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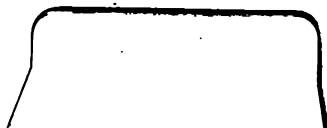
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104

105

106

107

108

109

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111

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114

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120

121

122

123

124

125

126

127

128

129

130

131

132

133

134

135

136

137

138

139

140



"He approached, and took her gently by the hand. She must have been half unconscious; for she looked wildly in his face, but spoke not."—Page 7.

JESSIE MELVILLE:

OR,

THE DOUBLE SACRIFICE.

AN EDINBURGH TALE.

EDINBURGH:
THOMAS GRANT, 21 GEORGE STREET.
LONDON: HOULSTON & STONEMAN.

MDCCCLVI.

249. u. 69.

CONTENTS.

	Page
The Night Meeting,	5
Explanations,	19
The Growth of Love,	32
A Storm,	44
Death-Bed Revelations,	56
The Resolution,	66
Grace Fergusson,	76
A New Home,	89
The Secret Disclosed,	100
The Parting,	112
Grace made Happy,	127
The Sacrifice Completed,	140
Sunset,	152
Villanous Schemes,	165
A Business Transaction,	179
Jessie's Capture,	190
Prison Life and Prison Work,	202
Robbery,	215
The Moral Change,	227
Father and Son,	242
Winter Work,	254
Reunion,	256
Love and Happiness,	277
Strange News,	289
Hooker Hooked,	302
The Conquest,	320
Conclusion,	337

JESSIE MELVILLE.

CHAPTER I.

THE NIGHT MEETING.

It was late on a bitter cold December night, that a young man was passing along the streets of Edinburgh towards his home, at the west end of Queen Street. Dark and dismal it was, for the shops in the New Town were all shut, and the street lamps flickered fitfully in the wind. For days an intense black frost had held firm possession of the earth, and a biting air from the north had steadily prevailed; but towards the gloaming of the evening to which we refer, the clear blue brightness of the sky gave place to that thick leaden haze, which, coming gradually on, and growing up from all parts of the horizon, but blackest in the direction of the wind, is the sure indication of a settled snow-storm. Soon the whistling gusts told that the blast approached, and anon the white, hard flakes of snow rattled on the pavement, and against the windows. Cold as the air had been before, it was doubly penetrating now, chilling the passers-by to the very bone, and causing the blood almost to freeze in their veins. On, however, came the storm, darker grew the night, more wildly rushed the wind, bearing in its path clouds of

blinding drift, which it whirled into the areas, and sent flying along the streets in bewildering confusion.

As the hours drew nearer midnight, the storm increased in fury; and now as the young pedestrian, whom we have mentioned, hurried along the deserted streets, it raged around him with terrific force. Passing through West Register Street, he was for a few moments sheltered from its severity; but, in turning into St Andrew Square, he was suddenly exposed to all its relentless pelting, and, muffled and wrapped up as he was, he felt as if he would be frozen into stone. Direct from the bleak hills of Fife came the angry tempest, passing the broad Frith unimpeded, roaring with thunder up the steep declivity from Scotland Street, like some guilty fiend flying from an avenging fury.

Staggered for an instant, the youth turned his back to the violence of the hurricane, and held firmly by an iron railing; then gathering up all his resolution, he endeavoured to make his way across the north-east angle of the Square, in the direction of St David Street. He gained the opposite side, and was on the point of turning the corner of the garden, when, by the momentary gleam of a lamp, he discerned a female clinging to the low wall, her strength apparently gone, and as if entirely overcome by exhaustion. He paused and looked at the figure. As far as the imperfect light would permit him to determine, she was very young, and not of that class which, alas! is composed of "the waifs of womanhood." Had even this first suspicion which flashed across the young man's mind been found correct, he would not have left her unaided; for his was not a heart that turned away from suffering and helplessness, because it was associated with sin; but far less would innocence and virtue in weakness be passed by without assistance, however humble

the object, or however painful the circumstances in which it was found.

He approached and took her gently by the arm. She must have been half unconscious, for she looked wildly in his face, but spoke not. How beautiful she appeared as the light of the now more steady lamp shone full upon her, and revealed a face which all poets and good men love to gaze upon! One glance was sufficient to show that she was entitled to all the respect and protection which woman should ever receive from man. Very pale was that face, and it bore, too, the traces of deep anguish—a pain deeper far than mere exposure to the weather could occasion. There was in its expression much of sadness, and more of anxiety, as if from a cause other than personal. It bespoke anguish endured on account of another—intense sympathy with the sufferings of some dearly-loved one.

Strangely struck with the attitude and appearance of the girl thus unexpectedly encountered, it was some moments ere the young man could address her. At length, in accents of the utmost gentleness, he said, "You seem faint and exhausted; can I assist you in any way? can I see you to your home?"

At the sound of his voice, the wild, wandering stare left the fine full eye of the stranger, and was succeeded by a look of gratitude and joy, as she replied, "O, sir, can you direct me to a doctor? to one who—who visits the poor gratis. My mother is very ill, and hearing that Dr M——, of Queen Street, is generous enough to attend, free of charge, those whose means are too limited to pay for medical aid, I ventured to call at his house; but, alas! he is from home. Being excited and faint, when I reached these railings, I was forced to grasp them to avoid being blown forward by the

wind. O, pray, sir," she continued pleadingly, "direct me, if you can, to a surgeon; my mother may perish ere I get back."

And, under the influence of her emotions, the fair helpless girl seized the young man's arm, and directed such a look of entreaty on his countenance, that, had he been possessed of only common sympathies, he would have done all in his power to assist her. But he was no ordinary youth. His heart was one of the most tender and generous that ever beat in human bosom. The distressed of every kind found in him a friend who soothed and alleviated their sorrows to the utmost of his ability. Need we wonder, then, that an appeal made to him by such a lovely being was not disregarded; nay, that he resolved to visit her mother himself, and see what could be done for her relief. The words of the girl spoke volumes to him. He saw at a glance that it was poverty more than disease that was the cause of her trouble; and the language of the speaker pointed to better days, and a higher station of life, for it was gracefully and fluently spoken. The hand of misfortune had apparently fallen on them, and reduced them from affluence to poverty—nay, perchance to absolute want; for the girl's face, albeit so beautiful, was wan, and her cheeks were hollow. Perhaps, at this moment, hunger was gnawing away her young life—she, so fair and gentle, on whose form none but the softest winds ought to blow, and whose path should be strewn all along with flowers.

Quick as lightning did these thoughts pass across his mind; and scarcely had the girl done speaking, ere he said, even more kindly than before, and offering her his arm at the same time, "I will see your mother myself. I have some knowledge of medicine, and can probably give her some.

thing that will do her good. Meanwhile, you must be the first object of my care, for this bitter snow-drift has used you very roughly. Please accept my support, and take me to your home."

And, with a mute look of thanks, the girl promptly and confidently passed her arm within his, and they proceeded in the direction of the Old Town. No hesitation was evinced by her in putting herself, as it were, in the power of one entirely unknown. "Unto the pure all things are pure;" and the guileless heart and truthful intention are so clearly indexed by the language and the countenance, that they cannot be mistaken. Not a doubt or a misgiving had this helpless and weak one as she clung to the unknown youth, for his face was so frank and brotherly, and the tones of his voice so very full of real sympathy. And he, on his part, never for a moment questioned the reality of the tale of distress that had been told him, or the innocence and goodness of the being at his side. How blessed a thing it is to know that humanity, and the faith in it, are still to be found in our world! Terrible are the inroads that sin and its attendants have made on man's nature, and dreadfully marred has it become; but, blessed be God, the Evil One has not got entire possession of the splendid temple he has ruined. Sadly defaced it is, but here and there is to be found an arch and a pillar of the original building, to tell what once it was, and give the hope of its restoration. Yes, there *are* instances to be met with where the better and nobler feelings of the human heart are displayed; and here, in the streets of Edinburgh, on this cold December night, do we meet with one, beautiful and hope-inspiring. And be sure it will be followed by happy results. Never did a good deed pass unrequited. Sooner or later, its mellow fruit is plucked by the hand that

planted it. "Mercy is twice blessed—it blesses him that gives and him that takes." Let us see the operation of this beautiful law in the present case.

With their backs to the storm, the two young creatures, thus strangely linked together, found it not so difficult to proceed. The wind, formerly so unpropitious, now aided their progress; and the hard snow, rattling against them, rolled from their shoulders as fast as it fell. Still it was very, very cold, and the youth instinctively concluded that his companion was but scantily clad; so, unfolding the plaid which, in addition to a thick over-coat, he wore around him, he disposed it so as to shield, under its ample breadth, both their persons; and thus comfortably huddled, they made the best of their way—she well-nigh overpowered with joy and gratitude, and he rejoicing in the consciousness that he was engaged in the performance of a holy duty.

By this time the streets were silent and forsaken, with the exception of a few noisy revellers returning from their night's merriment, whose boisterous shouts were heard in the pauses of the blast. At the far end of the North Bridge the two pedestrians met such a company, composed of four young men, walking arm in arm on their side of the pavement. To avoid them was impossible; and as they seemed in the humour for rude enjoyment (?), even to pass them without notice on their part was, in the circumstances, unlikely. For a moment the young man suffered a pang of annoyance, as, on their approach, he recognised the voices as those of acquaintances; but such a feeling was only momentary, and by the time they were actually in front of them, his consciousness of rectitude made him indifferent to their presence.

It was as he feared. They stood still immediately in their path, and peered impudently into their faces.

"Ha! Ainslie, my boy," exclaimed one familiarly, "we have caught you at last."

"What! Ainslie?" said another; "and in such pretty company, too. Upon my soul, you know how to walk comfortably, at any rate, in a stormy night. Ah! you sly dog! and you would have us to believe that you never went out on the lark? Well, never mind—we'll not peach—only you'll have to get off your high horse of morality now. This night's lucky encounter has shown us that you are just one of ourselves after all. But come on, gents. Don't let us spoil sport in this way. Good night, Ainslie. Compliments to your charmer."

And with a loud laugh the thoughtless youths passed on, making the silent intervals of the storm vocal with the song, "Come under my Plaidie." During the few moments in which their way was thus rudely obstructed, the girl clung, as if terrified, to the arm of her guardian; but no sooner was their course again clear, than she exclaimed, while the lamp they passed showed her pale face crimson with a blush, "O, sir, let us separate. I cannot think of subjecting you further to the false and foul suspicions of your friends. I will go before or behind you, only do not peril your character by the exercise of such kindness and condescension."

Charmed beyond measure by the delicacy and self-sacrificing spirit manifested by this request, Ainslie, as his acquaintances had called him, only brought the half-withdrawn arm more closely to his side as he replied, "Do not be concerned on my account, my friend; my character cannot be injured by such a matter as this. We are no doubt commanded to abstain from every appearance of evil; but

if our position at this moment has the appearance of evil, it is because the evil heart and evil actions of men have made it so. In itself it is assuredly the opposite of wrong for man to protect and help his weak sister; and if the performance of this duty subjects him to ridicule or reproach, it only shows how far the race has departed from original purity, and how far vice and wrong-doing has infringed on social duty. But as things are, we can still afford to be true to ourselves and our Heaven-bestowed natures, and the knowledge that we are right will enable us to meet and surmount the jeers, or even the frowns, of our fellows."

He looked closely at his companion as he made these remarks, and was pleased to see that they were understood and appreciated. This little, and, at first sight, unfortunate occurrence, served to reveal much of their characters and sentiments to each other, and to make them grow in each other's esteem. Contentedly, therefore, they pursued their way in the same close alliance, and, but for the anxiety which the girl felt on her mother's account, she would have been happy, for of late she had not been used to such kindness, or met with such warm, generous sympathy.

They had now turned down the High Street, for she had said her home was in the Canongate. Late as it was, very many of the shops in this locality were open; and, notwithstanding the inclemency of the night, the street was full of life and bustle. Being Saturday evening, the weekly and Sabbath purchases were being made by the toiling artisan and his wife; and, alas! by the appearance of many, the weekly earnings were, in numerous cases, going for what is worse than useless—for that liquid poison called whisky, which dethrones the reason, blunts the sensibilities, sears the conscience, clothes the body with rags, and the loath-

some livery of disease, destroys the affections, and results in every species of wretchedness and woe.

Through this motely throng passed our two friends, and their appearance called forth no remark. Familiarity with similar fellowships, where, alas! vice is really present, had rendered the crowd indifferent to them. Those who noticed the couple at all would not regard them in a different light from what Ainslie's acquaintances did; but so accustomed were they to behold sin and shame walking by them, and perchance so steeped were they themselves in the dead sea of sensual iniquity, that they thought not of casting on the pair more than a passing glance.

They stopped, at length, at the entrance to a dark narrow close, and the girl intimated that the room, inhabited by herself and her mother, was in the fourth storey of one of the tall houses that lined its sides. Ainslie hereupon slipped from beneath his share of the plaid, and wrapped the whole of it round the form of his companion, saying, as he did so, that he was going into a neighbouring shop for the medicine which he conjectured her mother required. "But don't go up without me," he continued, "else I may lose my way in that black labyrinth. I will be back instantly."

So saying, he darted into a grocer's shop at hand and got a bottle of wine, with which he returned, and motioning to his fair friend to lead the way, they proceeded along the narrow passage, and into a dark doorway, within the threshold of which was the foot of the stair. As profound darkness surrounded them, the young man had to grope his way in the wake of his companion's footsteps. In ascending the winding stair, he felt the atmosphere close and oppressive, and sighed to think that one so refined, and, he was convinced, worthy, should inhabit such a locality. It

but strengthened his former impression that misfortunes, many and severe, had befallen the mother and daughter, and he mentally resolved to repair these, if within his power.

The fourth storey was at length reached, and the girl, taking a pass-key from her pocket, opened a door, and made her way into the apartment beyond, requesting Ainslie to move straight forward. He did so, and after walking a few paces, conjectured that he stood in the middle of the room, for all was still dark. Not a gleam was visible to show him where the fire-place was; but at one side he could faintly discern a window, and the dim light from other windows without. Presently the girl's voice rose from the opposite corner, asking earnestly if her mother was any better. A faint moan was the only answer; but the daughter endeavoured to infuse hope and consolation, by saying that a kind gentleman had come to visit her. Then, with the aid of a lucifer match, a candle was lighted, and as its feeble rays revealed the desolation that prevailed, she turned to Ainslie, and, with a broken voice, wherein sadness and firmness strove for the mastery, she said—

“I must apologise, sir, for the inability to offer you even a seat; but times are much changed with us, and—and——”

“I understand, I understand,” whispered Ainslie, hurriedly, as the beautiful girl burst into tears. “O why did we not meet earlier; for then much suffering, which I am convinced you have endured, might have been prevented?”

“Suffering, indeed, we have borne,” she replied, faintly; “but it is my mother's feeble health that pains me most. O, if she were but restored to strength, we might yet manage to support ourselves; but, owing to her helplessness, I have had to give up my work to take care of her; and in order to live, we have been obliged to dispose, by degrees, of all we

possessed, and now we are actually destitute. But O, sir, if by your aid, my mother can once more do without attendance, I shall again seek for work, and may be able to redeem what we have for the present parted with."

While the daughter was speaking, Ainslie, though attentively noting her words, had taken the light, and approached the mother's bedside. Little more than a glance served to confirm his previous idea that weakness was the substance of her ailment. Her face, which was turned towards the front of the bed, was pale and very small—shrunk and shrivelled more than age could account for. The eyes were closed, and the breathing was low, though not laboured. He spoke kindly to her, and asked how she felt; but the answer was made in such a low voice, that he could not catch the words.

"Could you give me a glass, or a cup?" he said, turning to his late companion, and uncorking the bottle of wine, which had been already drawn. Going to a corner, she returned with a broken dish, which she put into his hands, and which he filled, and requested the invalid to drink. With the daughter's assistance, her head was raised, and the vessel placed to her lips. Greedily, O how greedily, she drank, and how instantaneous was the effect! A new strength that moment seemed to be imparted. The bodily energy, which was about to bid a final farewell to the frame, because it was denied support, came back joyfully to its duty at the call of the stimulating liquor; and having drained the cup to the dregs, the sufferer lay back with a sigh of intense satisfaction. As her head reached the pillow, her eye fell on the face of the young man, who was bending over her, and on whose countenance the rays of the candle distinctly fell. She started visibly as she beheld him, as if his face called up some remembrance to her mind—a remem-

brance, too, of some thrilling nature; for it was with a look of strong emotion that she regarded him. It was not a look of direct and absolute intelligence, but one of a puzzled and reflective sort. Evidently she could not discover why she thus gazed, or what it was about him that startled and interested her. It was one of those emotions which seize the soul instinctively, or rather intuitively, and which the individual who experiences it cannot explain at the time, but it invariably happens that the feeling is afterwards accounted for, and justified. Memory may not, at the moment, serve to recall the associations which the eye dimly connects with the object which so strangely attracts it; but it generally happens that these are finally called up, and the legitimate connection amply established.

"You feel better now," said Ainslie, with a smile, as he remarked the earnest look of the woman.

"O yes, much better," she replied, and turned away her eyes, as if unable to find out the cause of her emotion. "May the guid God, who has put it into your heart to visit and succour us, reward you bountifully for your kindness! But I can only offer you thanks—puir payment for a visit on such a cauld nicht as this. But when I get weel again, Jessie and I will labour to repay you."

"Talk not of payment, my friend," interrupted Ainslie. "The satisfaction I at this moment feel is far more than compensation for anything I have done, or may do for you. Meanwhile, you must try to get a little sleep, and be assured I shall visit you again in the morning."

And so quickly did the wine exert its influence, that as he spoke she sunk into a soft slumber. His plaid, which the girl still held in her hand, he spread upon the bed; for, like everything else, it was scantily provided, and was

in no condition to keep out the bitter cold of the night. Then motioning to the daughter to follow him to the other side of the room, he whispered, "Now, you must be guided entirely by my wishes. Do you promise to obey me in every thing that I desire?"

"Implicitly," she replied, while a bright, grateful smile lighted up her fair countenance.

"Then be kind enough," he resumed, with a quiet gravity, "to give me a certain packet of *tickets* which you have somewhere in the room; I have a particular desire to get them."

She hesitated, although her face betrayed consciousness as to his meaning.

"Come now," he continued, noticing her embarrassment. "You promised, you know, to do as I wished; are you going to draw back already?"

Without saying a word she put the packet into his hand, and he prepared to depart. At the threshold he turned and said, "If your mother—I mean Mrs.—Mrs——"

"Melville," explained the girl.

"Yes, if she should awake, you will give her a little more wine." And he proceeded a step or two into the passage, glad that by a little artifice he had procured the name, since this was necessary to his intentions. The girl showed him down the stair with the light, and at the doorway they parted. He held out his hand, and as he grasped hers, said gaily—

"I intend to invite myself to breakfast with you in the morning; what is your hour?"

"O sir, we would be most happy to receive you," she replied, greatly distressed, "but——"

"Nay! nay; I will positively take no denial. Say nine

o'clock. I will be with you at that hour." Saying which, he hurried off ere another word could be said, and vanished at the entrance to the close.

His first act was to go to a lamp, and see the name of the pawnbroker whose cards he had got. It was a shop in St Mary's Wynd, and thither he went at speed, for it wanted little more than an hour to midnight. He paid the broker's demands on Mrs Melville, and ordered everything to be taken up immediately, which the obsequious dealer promised to do. Next he hurried to a general provision shop, and purchased a supply of all necessities—coals, candles, bread, tea, sugar, beef, and other things. These he also ordered to be sent immediately to the house; and having thus provided amply for to-morrow's wants, he once more took his way homeward.

The wind was no less boisterous, and the snow pelted as relentlessly as before, but the warm glow at his heart kept the cold out. The blessing of her that was ready to perish was already coming upon him—for his mind was filled with calm delight and holy satisfaction. As he lifted the latch of the door which admitted him to his splendid home in Queen Street, he unconsciously murmured, "And so the name of this interesting girl is JESSIE MELVILLE!"

CHAPTER II.

EXPLANATIONS.

THE succeeding morning was calm, clear, and cloudless. Some time after the city clocks had tolled the hour of eight, William Ainalie again left his father's house, to visit and breakfast with, according to promise, his new-found friends in the Canongate. What a beautiful sight met his gaze as he emerged into the long street! Everything was covered with a dazzling white, pure and immaculate as those "white robes" we read of in that sublime Patmos vision. It was evident that, after the wind had fallen, the snow had still continued to descend—not in those small, hard particles which had been driven hither and thither by the wild mood of the angry blast, but in large, fleecy flakes, which cling to every thing they fall upon, and clothe them with garments of beauty. All the door steps and the tops of the area railings were shining with their white coverings; but the grandest sight of all was the trees in the opposite gardens, the bare, leafless branches of which had all become white nodding plumes, the meanest of which might have adorned the brow of a returning victor. There they stood, thousands of them, in the clear, cold air of the morning, bending gracefully on every side, waiting the appearance of the sun above the house-tops, to be dissolved by his rays—like a troop of courtiers standing in the anti-room of a king, till the

monarch shows his morning face, and lets them depart. Like Jonah's gourd, they grew in a night; like it, they were beautiful; and like it, too, short-lived; for ere the bells would call the citizens to worship, much of their glory would be gone.

The city of Edinburgh is delightful on many accounts. "Beautiful for situation," it may with propriety be called the joy of all Scotland, as it assuredly is its greatest ornament and boast. Whether we think of its architectural beauty, its picturesque situation, its grand historical buildings, its physical history, or the genius, the intellect, the eloquence, and the fame that flourished in bygone days, or still flourishes within it, we see enough to place it in the front rank of cities; and when we combine all these, we discover with pride and pleasure that it fairly occupies the first position in that front rank. But of all the fair sights to be gazed upon and admired in Edinburgh, we know of nothing so pleasurable and joy-inspiring as the appearance of its streets in the early Sabbath morning, as, indeed, throughout the whole Sabbath-day. Their cleanness, their quietness before the hours of Divine worship, and the number and respectability of those who, at the sound of the bells, flock towards the various churches, is all suggestive and characteristic. These things tell us that we are in the capital of God-fearing, Covenanting Scotland, and that the old glory has not altogether faded from the land. Go into what city we will, and we fail to see such beautiful marks of Sabbath observance. Glasgow has much to be praised for on this account; and if it cannot present such a fair moral aspect on the day of rest, it is because its inhabitants are more mixed, and its physical position more unfavourable. But when we leave our own land, and visit any of the large towns in England, the difference is

very marked; while on the continent, so great is the change, that a Scotchman is at once shocked and saddened to see that day, which, in his country, is held so sacred, treated with such disrespect and profanation.

Such thoughts as these filled the mind of William Ainslie as he wended his way to the Old Town. Young as he was, he had travelled much, and observed keenly as he travelled; and often, when in the gay towns of France, had he sighed for the quiet and solemnity of a Scottish Sabbath. But such experience of other countries only served to deepen his attachment to his own land, and caused his feet to turn willingly and ardently in the direction of its shores. He had lived much in Edinburgh, had received the principal part of his education at its High School and University, and was warmly attached to it. Gay and glad, then, was his young fresh spirit, as on this bright winter morning he traversed its silent streets. Naturally of a buoyant, hopeful disposition, he was now more than ordinarily cheerful, for the happy recollection of yesternight's adventure dwelt within his soul, and filled it with satisfying delight. Then he anticipated much pleasure from his morning visit. Jessie Melville had flitted before him in his dreams, with her pale yet lovely face, and he longed to see her in the light of day, and under better circumstances. Good, unaffected, and intelligent, he was sure she was, as well as beautiful, and he already looked upon her as a sister—nay, may we not add, that unconsciously the seed of a warmer and stronger affection had been sown in his heart?

He reached the entrance to the close as the Tron Church clock struck nine. It did not look so dismal and disagreeable as on the previous night, but yet it was narrow, dark, and far from airy. The houses were very high, black, and old.

Once they had formed the residences of the Scottish aristocracy, and a certain air of grandeur still attached to them; but now they afforded shelter to the poorest and humblest of the city, while the class that once tenanted them had migrated to the handsome squares and elegant buildings at the west end of the New Town.

The step of Ainslie had been heard on the stair; for, when he reached Mrs Melville's door, Jessie was at its threshold ready to receive him. A bright, animated, grateful smile illuminated her countenance as she stretched forth her hand and grasped his, shaking it warmly.

"Good morning, Miss Melville," exclaimed Ainslie, gaily; then, with an arch smile, continued—"Here I am, you see, and come to breakfast, too, though you did not endorse the invitation I gave myself last night."

"Never was visitor more welcome, sir," answered Jessie, "and I hope you will pardon my seeming want of hospitality: it was only the circumstances which your unparalleled generosity has relieved that made me hesitate. But I trust," she added, eagerly, whilst she blushed at her own earnestness, "you do not attribute it to any but the right cause; you do not think that—that——"

"I think only," interrupted the young man, as he noticed her distress, "that it was very cruel and thoughtless on my part to give you a moment's uneasiness on the subject. Pray, forgive me, and shake hands again, in token that you do so."

And, with a frank, friendly clasp, they passed the matter over. On entering the apartment, Ainslie was amazed to see the change that had taken place since his previous visit. Comfort, if not elegance, reigned where desolation had prevailed. The room was nicely, not to say tastefully,

furnished. Neat covered chairs were ranged against the walls, a carpet covered the floor, the bed was hung with clean curtains, a bright fire blazed in the grate, and in the centre stood a large table, clad in white, and spread over with materials for an ample breakfast. Seated in a comfortable arm-chair near the fire was Mrs Melville, her face still wan and emaciated, but her weakness was greatly lessened, and she seemed very much better.

Ainslie noticed all these things at a glance. As he stepped forward to the fire, Jessie said, "Here is our benefactor, mother; I am sure you must be eager to welcome him."

"Welcome him!" exclaimed the old woman, joyfully, "and what kind o' a heart wad I hae if I didna? O, my bonnie young man," she said, rising to her feet, and stretching out both hands to the visitor, "ye did a deed last nicht that canna be repaid. We may pay you ower and ower again the siller ye laid out, but we can never thank you enough for the kindness that you showed us. And yet, when I look at you, your bonnie round face and laughin e'e tells me ye can afford to be sae generous, and that your heart as well as your purse is open to the wants o' the puir. What a muckle better world this wad be if there were mair like you in it, and how often wad the hearts o' the unfortunate be made glad as mine is this morning." And with an impulse she could not resist, she flung her arms round his neck, and kissed him. He received the embrace with an emotion which he himself could not account for, and folding his arms tenderly round the invalid, while she sobbed like a child on his bosom, he replied—

"You speak truly, Mrs Melville; kindness and sympathy are far too rare in our world. Men are too much engrossed in selfish pursuits to heed or to help those around them who

are in distress; and yet they know not the pleasure and happiness of which they deprive themselves. Did they but faintly guess the satisfaction that the little duty I have done to you affords me at this moment, methinks they would oftener put forth a helping hand to succour their suffering brethren. But, positively, Mrs Melville, you must speak no more of payment or thanks. I am already far more than compensated for what I have done, since it has opened up to me such sincere friendship. I assure you it will only pain me to hear it mentioned again, so, as a favour, I beg it may not be any more alluded to."

He now seated the old woman in the chair, and proceeded to remove his great-coat. While this scene was passing with Ainslie and her mother, Jessie looked on with tearful eyes. Every movement, every word of the youth, served to raise him in her estimation. How noble and manly he appeared in her eyes as he pressed her mother to his bosom, and disclaimed all merit for his generosity! Can we wonder that her heart was drawn towards him, or that she longed to call him brother? And, on the other hand, may we not surmise that he would have had no objections to be greeted by Jessie as he had been by her mother? Had prudence and propriety not forbidden, he would gladly have clasped her as a sister in his arms, and imprinted one pure brotherly kiss on her lips. But he might not thus indulge; and, therefore, while divesting himself of his overcoat, he had to be contented with gazing upon her. Like every thing around, she too was immensely improved. Her dress was plain, yet exceeding neat and becoming. The sadness and anguish which the night before was settled on her face had fled, and something like what he conjectured to be natural bloom had returned to it. She was evidently

cheerful and sprightly in nature. Her bright eye had a merry glance about it, which betokened a fresh, simple, unaffected heart; there was altogether a genuineness about her which few girls of her age possess. Her air was natural and graceful; in most circumstances she would be calm and self-possessed. Her character was decided, and apparently of great force; while her sensibilities and affections seemed exquisite, strong, and pure.

But at length the three sat down to breakfast, and the various viands were partaken of with much relish, for all were happy, and comparatively free from care. The mother spoke but little, yet she appeared to enjoy the meal with no ordinary satisfaction; though ever and again her eye rested on the young man's face with the same earnest, puzzled, reflective look, which she bent upon him the night before. The two young folks, however, chatted very freely. Ainslie purposely led the conversation into various channels, to draw out the intelligence of Jessie, and he found her knowledge at once useful and extensive. On all common subjects she could converse fluently; with the literature and poetry of the day she was familiar, and hesitated not to avow her preferences or state her dislikes, though in doing both it was with the most charming modesty. In the present instance, however, she had no dissent to encounter, for her companion's tastes and sentiments were similar to her own; and, as may easily be imagined, this mental congeniality only served to draw the sympathies of the two young persons more closely together.

Breakfast over, and the "dishes" removed, the little party drew around the fire, for though the sun was shining brightly without, it was December still, and the air was

sold. When comfortably seated and prepared to enjoy a further conversation, Mrs Melville turned to her guest, and said—

“Maybe, sir, though you dinna want us to speak ony mair about your kindness, ye’ll no hae ony objections to a short sketch o’ our history?”

It was the very thing Ainslie longed to know—who his new friends were, and how they had been reduced to such difficulties—he therefore replied with alacrity, “If agreeable to you, Mrs Melville, I should certainly consider such a sketch as a favour.”

“O no a favour, sir, no a favour, but a richt. It’s only proper that you should ken wha you hae befriended, and hoo it was that we hae fallen sae low as ye hae found us. But the story needna be lang, since twa or three words will tell it.

“My husband and I were lang servants in a gentleman’s house. He was the butler, and I was the mistress’s favourite attendant. Not very lang after our marriage—indeed, just about six weeks after Jessie there was born—the family made up their minds to gang to France, or somewhere else; for ye see they had been living beyond their income, and though the estates werena entailed, yet the laird wanted to preserve them hail; for ye see he—he had gotten an heir a short while before, and it was for him he was guanna keep them. Sae away they went, after breaking up the establishment, and parting with the servants. We were paid aff like the lave; for, besides that we were married and had a bairn, we could hae been o’ little use in a foreign place. Baith o’ us had saved something. Sae we cam to Edinburgh, and took up a shop in the High Street, where we might have dune weel, but the

next year was the awful cholera year, and my puir guidman was ane o' its victims. After that the shop dwindled awa, and I saw it was nae use to keep it on ony langer; see when Martimas cam I gied it up, and flitted to a bonnie little house at St Leonards. Here we lived for mony years on the savings we had gathered. I tried to get something to dae, but I never had been used to onything but attending my leddy, and found that I wasna fitted for other work. There was ae thing I was resolved on, frae the very first, and that was to give Jessie a good education. I hae done that; and though I say it that shouldna say it, she is now fit to gang into maist ony society. But I see she is blushing at what I am saying, but she doesna need, for she ~~kens~~ it's true."

"Yes, dear mother," said Jessie, on whose crimson face the eyes of Ainslie were now resting with admiration, "you have indeed done your part, and more than your part, by me. I only trust that I shall have an opportunity of repaying you in some measure for your early care."

"Repay me, hinnie!" exclaimed the mother fondly; and have you not repaid me? Wha has been workin' for me for years, and wha has looked after me when I was ill, but you? My certie, where wad we baith hae been now, but for your earnings? And yet ye speak o' repaying me! Wheisht, lassie! Wheisht! wheisht!"

Deeper and deeper grew the glow on Jessie's cheek as her mother thus lauded and praised her, and more marked grew the delighted look of Ainslie as he had further proof of the consideration and goodness of her heart. But to remove her marked confusion, he requested Mrs Melville to continue her story.

"Weel, year after year passed away, and sae did our

money. When Jessie cam to be a big girl, I had to tell her hoo things were, and frae that moment naething wad serve her but to gang and seek some kind o' wark. She wanted to be a governess, for she was fit enough for it; but we had nae friends to recommend her, and naebody wad engage her without kennin' something about her. After answering I dinna ken hoo many advertisements in the *North British Advertiser*, and getting nae reply, what does she dae ae morning but gang awa wi' Mary Richardson, an acquaintance o' hers, to learn the book-faulding? Mary was working in Chambers's shop; for the "Journal" was begun then, and they keepit, as they dae yet, a great mony lasses. Weel, wi' Mary's recommendation—for she was a kind-hearted, weel-behaved girl—Jessie was ta'en on as an apprentice, and she wasna lang in being as guid at it as her neebours. Her earnings were sma, nae doot, but it was better than naething, and we managed to mak baith ends meet. But, a year syne, Providence saw fit to throw me into a puir state of health, and Jessie had to leave her wark to look after me. Soon we had to flit frae St Leonards to this close, for the rent was cheaper. Our bonnie furniture went to the pawn-shop bit by bit, my weakness got nae better, but waur—for, to tell you the truth, anxiety as weel as poverty was the cause of it; and sae it happened that last nicht, when Jessie set out for a doctor, and fell in wi' you, baith o' us were at death's door wi' starvation."

"Dinna greet, Jessie, my bairn," continued the speaker, as the sobs of the poor girl here became irrepressible. Ainslie's own eyes were suffused with tears, and his manly heart bled at the idea of so much suffering. "Dinna greet," said the old woman; "it is past now, and we may yet see better days. I am muckle better this morning, and you

are looking maist as bonnie as you used to do. There ye gang again, blushing like a red rose. What needs ye hing yer head that way? it's weel kent ye *are* bonnie."

To stop the words of her well-intentioned mother, Jessie rose, threw her arms round her neck, and kissed her, saying, at the same time—

"Yes, dear mother, I trust our darkest days are past; you are indeed looking much better, and perhaps I may be able to go to work again this week."

"For the present, at least, my friends," said Ainslie, cheerfully, "you must forget both the past and the future. This is, you know, the day of rest, when worldly care and anxiety should be banished from the mind; let us, therefore, resolve to make it such in all its literal meaning. Perhaps you will now be interested to know who I am, so, with your leave, I will inform you."

At these words, Jessie left her mother's side, and resumed her seat, while Mrs Melville hastened to say how gratified they would be to learn the name of her preserver.

And so he began—"My parents are both natives of Scotland, and in this country I, too, was born; but, during the first three years of my life, I lived with the family abroad. My father, however, who wished me to be a thorough Scotchman, sent me, by the hands of a friend, to a female relative in Edinburgh, and in her house I spent the years of my boyhood. When I was nine years of age, she received instructions from my parent to board me with Mr G——, one of the masters of the High School, at which famous seminary I was to be rudimentally educated. Under the roof of this amiable gentleman I lived for ten years, when I again went to reside in Heriot Row with my relative, and attended the University for four sessions. At the end of this time, I

joined my family abroad, and, after making a continental tour in the company of my father, we all returned to Scotland a few months ago, and intend spending the winter in the city, leaving it for the country in spring; for Sir William, my father, is most anxious to settle again among his tenantry in the west."

"Sir William," almost shrieked Mrs Melville, who had listened to the young man's words with breathless interest—"Sir William what?"

"Sir William Ainslie of Broomfield Park," returned the youth, astonished at her vehemence.

With a strange, bewildering cry, the old woman fell back in her chair senseless, while Ainslie and her daughter rushed to her aid, wholly unable to understand the cause of her emotion. In a few minutes she rallied, and gazed into the young man's countenance with a long, steadfast, yearning gaze. Then, seeing the astonishment that her conduct had caused, she shuddered, as if suddenly recollecting that she had almost betrayed herself, and said—

"It was in Sir William's family that my husband and myself were sae lang servants; and it was the sudden knowledge that—that you are his son, which so overcame me."

Great were the rejoicings in the hearts of the young people at this discovery, and they immediately began to reflect on the special providence which had so strangely brought them together. In the midst of their wonderings and congratulations, the bells began to toll for public worship, and Ainslie proposed that he and Jessie should go to church together. The young girl was evidently delighted with the idea, but had scruples about leaving her mother alone in her weak and excited state. These the mother

herself removed by at once consenting that she should go. In a few minutes, therefore, they were ready to set out. As the door closed on their departing figures, Mrs Melville, who had kept her eyes continually on Ainslie, clasped her hands together, lifted up her face to heaven, and exclaimed, "It's my ain bairn—the bairn I parted wi' the moment he was born, and hinna seen since syne."

CHAPTER III.

THE GROWTH OF LOVE.

LET not the reader be startled to learn that the knowledge gained by William Ainslie of the social position of Mrs Melville and her daughter did in no way diminish his respect for, or change his friendship towards them. We are perfectly aware of the importance the world attaches to rank and station ; and were we writing merely a fictitious story, in which the rules of art are made to shape the incidents, we, as a matter of course, would have to state that when the baronet's son found that Mrs Melville had been but a servant in his family, and Jessie but the daughter of his father's butler, he either withdrew into the distance of his superior rank, or continued the same outward show of kind familiarity for base and unworthy purposes.

But truth, while stranger, is also more natural than fiction. It deals more with the affections of the heart, and the deliberations of the judgment, than with codes of conventionalism ; and these may under its sway be entirely set aside without its own prerogative being assailed, or the rules of true propriety invaded. William Ainslie was not one who looked upon life and its concerns from a worldly viewpoint. With him the mental and not the material standard constituted lines of demarcation between man and man. Though the son and heir of a baronet, he had never been

accustomed to think of himself in this light, chiefly owing to the circumstances surrounding his youth. Had he been brought up with his father, such notions of family pride and consequence would in all likelihood have grown with his growth, and strengthened with his strength; for Sir William was one who looked upon these matters as of paramount importance; but his father's sister, with whom he spent his extreme youth, was a very different person, and the years spent at the Edinburgh High School tended still more to exclude from his mind aristocratic principles.

The consequence, therefore, was, that when introduced to the reader's notice, he was a young man of good heart, good education, and good principles. As we said before, he judged of others entirely by their mental worth, and could see no reason why he should not look upon Jessie Melville as his equal, simply because she was poor, or, as it is termed, lowly born. He found her possessed of as good qualities, and as many useful accomplishments, as any young lady with whom he had associated, and these possessions constituted in his estimation the grounds by which every person's true position is determined. It mattered nothing to him whether her parents were princes or peasants; he found her worth associating with, in every respect worthy of the name, and beyond this he thought not and cared not.

Jessie herself might, after knowing their relative positions, have, on the grounds of female modesty and propriety, shrunk back from such familiar acquaintanceship; but, poor girl, her heart was so full of gratitude and admiration, not to say affection for him and his noble manly character, that she thought not of conventional requirements, but was only too glad when his step was heard on the stair, or when she walked by his side in the Meadows, on bright frosty

moonlight nights, or when they sat together in church singing from the same psalm-book. Where could there possibly be either justice or propriety in the social law that would prohibit such congenial intercourse? These must, O yes, these must be bad, unnatural requirements which ruthlessly trample on the free, happy, innocent commingling of two young mated hearts.

Mrs. Melville was the only one of the three who might have been expected to see the impropriety, if impropriety there were, in such brotherly (?) and sisterly communion; but, strange to say, she rather encouraged it than otherwise. But of late she had shown strange manifestations. Ever since she knew the name and rank of their preserver, she had been in a condition of great mental excitement. She regarded Ainslie with a fitful and sometimes an unaccountable tenderness. At times she would treat him with every mark of the fondest endearment; and then, as if conscious that such expressions of tenderness were, as matters stood, uncalled for and surprising to their object, she would suddenly turn away with something like fear or dread. All this Ainslie noticed; but while surprised, considered it as but the promptings of gratitude, which an extremely susceptible heart sent gushing forth. He, therefore, only met her caresses with a filial response, and thus the first appearance of familiar friendship was deepened and increased by after intercourse.

Of course, no one need be told how the thing went. Very soon William Ainslie and Jessie Melville loved each other as only two amiable, warm-hearted, virtuous beings can love. In each other's eyes they were the very ideal of excellence—he all manly strength and beauty, she all womanly loveliness and grace. They had the same tastes and sentiments,

the same feelings and desires—viewed human life from the same generous view-point, and revered the great Father with a twin sincerity.

After Mrs Melville became convalescent, Ainslie wished to get Jessie into a situation somewhat congenial with her qualifications, and proposed that she should take the charge of two orphan grandchildren of his aunt's, as he knew she had been some time in search of one both trustworthy and qualified for this sacred duty. Jessie would willingly have agreed to the proposal, but her mother most accountably opposed it. A proper reason for such opposition she never gave, but she manifested towards it such a morbid dislike, that her daughter gave up all thoughts of it. Yet idle she would not be, and, in the meantime, returned to the Messrs Chambers's establishment, where she had always been a great favourite with the other girls. Here she worked incessantly, and by her earnings supported both her mother and herself; for although Ainslie would gladly have continued his pecuniary assistance, she steadily refused it.

"No, William," was her noble answer, "I gratefully and frankly accepted the aid you generously proffered on that memorable Saturday night, but I can now supply our moderate wants; and though I know you would give with the same brotherly regard as before, you know it would be wrong on my part to consent."

And so that matter was finally set at rest, for Ainslie could not but see the propriety of such a spirit of independence. Yet in many ways, and by delicate means, he managed to increase their home comforts. The butcher's boy occasionally appeared with a leg of mutton, and his master's compliments. The grocer begged Mrs Melville's frequent acceptance of a pound of his best congo, or a cut

from a particular cheese; and the baker did not seem satisfied till he had been favoured with her experimental opinion of his fancy breads. These gifts, which the receivers traced at once to their true source, were received with a silent delight, as so many proofs of Ainslie's disinterested goodness; and they never failed to bring them forth when he visited them, to show that they both received and appreciated his delicate attentions.

But time passed on. The new-year, with its noisy and gleesome festivities, came round, and Ainslie took Jessie to visit the various sights of the season—the pantomime, the panorama, and other harmless exhibitions. What long walks they had together, too, even at that cold and dreary season of the year! It was eight o'clock ere Jessie left the workroom, and on most nights scarcely had she walked many paces till the old familiar plaid was cast around her shoulders, and she felt herself drawn to the sheltering side of her lover. Home and supper were the first objects of consideration; but, if it was moonlight, they soon left the house to wander in the suburbs, and commune with each other's hearts under the holy night-heaven. One night they so rambled off in the direction of Arthur Seat, though the snow lay on the ground, and a bitter wind from the east whistled over the shaggy side of the Crag. The moon was hid behind a light fleecy sky, and rendered the night like a dim twilight. On they went, over hill and dale, in the midst of silence and solitude, till they reached the side of Dunsappie. The little loch was covered with a strong thick sheet of ice, on the surface of which the Edinburgh youths had skimmed all day, but now it was deserted. With all the enthusiasm of former days, Ainslie scoured along one of the slides that stretched from bank to bank, and Jessie stood admiring his steady graceful move-

ments. He would have her to venture along with him, but she was too timid to trust herself on the ice, even in his hands.

Leaving the vicinity of Dunsappie, the two wanderers, again absorbed in conversation, proceeded homeward by the top of the Crag. What a glorious prospect burst upon them when they came in sight of the city from that eminence! The thousands of lamps, burning in a ground of snow, and looking doubly bright because of their pure environment, spread themselves all out before them, forming a picture so dazzling and brilliant, that both declared it was worth more than the walk to behold it. The hum and revelry of the evening came softly, and subdued by distance, on their ear; the smoke of the day had been chased over the Pentlands by the rough east wind; while these grand old hills, and the wooded eminence of Corstorphine, formed a noble back-ground to the splendid panorama.

"How gorgeous!" said Ainslie, to his companion; "yet how much misery, and vice, and sin, is festering in the bosom of that fair scene!"

"Ah, yes," answered Jessie; "and how many cheerless hearts, and fireless hearths, and desolate homes rest beneath the gaudy surface!"

Both remarks were true, and both characteristic of the speakers. The former came from the stern masculine heart, that looked at the dark realities of a sin-cursed world; the latter emanated from the tender, sympathizing, considerate, womanly breast of one who remembered the poor, and had a fellow-feeling with wretchedness, "for she had felt the same."

In this way, then, did the hearts of these two young beings become indissolubly linked to each other; so that when

spring came, and the time of Ainslie's departure with his family to the country drew near, though no avowal had been made, they felt, deeply felt, that they loved. One night, in the middle of March, after Jessie had returned from work accompanied by William, the three were sitting round the fire chatting, previous to the pair setting forth for a stroll in the Meadows.

"By the bye," said Ainslie, playfully, to Jessie, who sat on a low stool at his side, "I must have a present from you to-morrow; it is my twenty-fifth birthday."

"Indeed!" answered Jessie, with pleased surprise, "then you and I are exactly of an age, for, to-morrow, I am also twenty-five years old."

"Impossible!" he resumed; "why, you look not more than twenty. But is it possible, Mrs Melville, that we were born at Broomfield Park on the same night?"

When Ainslie looked to the old woman for a reply to this interrogatory, she was ghastly pale, and a quiver as of alarm passed over her frame. Then, seeing the eyes of both fixed on her intently, she forced a smile, and said, hesitatingly:—

"Yes, if I mind richtly, ye were—that is, my leddy and mysel' were brought to bed within twa hours o'ane anither."

"Dear me, mother," said Jessie, wonderingly, "I am surprised that you never mentioned this interesting circumstance before."

"Did I no? I maun hae forgotten, then;" and, as if anxious to change the subject, she looked out into the court, where the rays of the silver moon fell brightly, and said, "Come awa; if ye are wanting a walk, this braw nicht, it's time ye were settin' out. But dinna be lang in coming back, for the nicht air lous guid for folk, and, forby, it no looks

weel for youths to be stravin' about the toon when it's late."

No further hint was needed. Jessie was quickly arrayed in "walking gear," and in two minutes the pair had left the mouth of the cloee, and taken their way up the Canongate.

"Shall we go along the Bridge and Nicolson Street?" said Jessie. "The shops are not yet shut, and I feel great pleasure in gazing in at the windows in gas-light."

"Not to-night, Jessie," answered Ainslie, gravely. "We cannot afford to pass this beautiful night in the smoky streets. Let us go to the Meadows, where the moon will shine down upon us among the trees, where the free spring breeze will flutter around us, and where the holy calm of nature may be enjoyed."

"You like the country," responded Jessie, with a glance at the expressive countenance of the speaker.

"O yes, I am very fond of it," he replied, ardently, "though my visits to it have been seldom and short; I think I could never tire of rural scenes and a country life. Every thing looks so calm and sweet, so beautiful and fresh. The very air is different. It is not the dim, hazy thickness which floats for ever around Edinburgh, but a clear, transparent atmosphere, through which you can distinctly see the most distant objects; and then the flowers, and the birds, and murmuring streams, and green old woods, and waving corn-fields, are things which never grow tiresome. O yes, I love the country."

For some time after the utterance of these sentiments, the two walked on in silence, busy, apparently, with their own thoughts. They passed down the splendid avenue to the Meadows without exchanging a word; but in striking off in the direction of the Nunnery, Ainslie said—

"To tell you the truth, Jessie, I did not choose this place for our walk, simply to admire and enjoy the moonlight; I had another purpose in view. Very soon, as you know, I leave Edinburgh for Broomfield Park, and then we must separate. Now, I wanted to come to an understanding on something very important before I quit you. I think I need not tell you, my dear Jessie, that I love you; you are, indeed, the only girl I do love. Our minds and tastes are so similar, your person and ways are so attractive, that it would have been the grossest blindness on my part had it been otherwise. But I cannot—and I dare say you would despise me if I did—I cannot break forth into those extravagant utterances which novelists tell us are common on occasions like this. That my love is deep and sincere you must believe, but it does not run away with my reason; and while I feel most strongly the importance of the declaration I am making, I know very well what I *am* saying, and what I mean—in one word, I want you to be my wife. You have seen something now of what I am—you will therefore know if I am fitted to make you happy; and, in replying to my request, I know you will deal frankly with me. Maidenly modesty is all very good; but when a young girl has to utter her sentiments at a moment like this, I cannot approve of that shyness, and even hypocrisy, which these same novelists tell us of. The matter is by far too momentous for anything but openness and straightforwardness. Now, Jessie, may I hope to call you my *own* Jessie? Will you return my affection, and become my wife?"

Slowly, calmly, deliberately, and gravely, yet very kindly, nay, even with a yearning tenderness, did William Ainslie make this confession of his love to the fair young creature at his side; and she listened with pleasure, deep unfathomable

pleasure, for her heart was his long ago; and though he had never spoken thus before, she knew she was dear to him. When he finished, he had not long to wait for her reply, though a bright burning blush did suffuse her face as she drew it into the shadow.

"William," she said, softly, yet firmly, "it would be vain and foolish in me to deny that your words are pleasant to me; but have you considered all things carefully when you ask me to become your wife? You know who I am, and how far I am beneath you in station. Have you looked at this in all its bearings, and are you prepared to encounter the opinions of your friends? Remember that they share neither your feelings nor perhaps your sentiments. Rank and social position may be everything in their eyes, though in yours they are not all in all. Now, should your father, for instance, when he knows I am the daughter of his butler, oppose our union, what——"

"I have little fear on that head," answered her lover, seeing her hesitate. "It is true I know very little of my father, having never, I may say, seen him till lately: but I cannot suppose him to be one who would object to the happiness and welfare of his son, simply because the woman of my choice is not the daughter of such and such a man, or descended from such and such a family. But if he should be so unreasonable, I cannot see it to be my duty to yield to him, and will rather seek for myself an independence, if you will consent to be mine on such terms."

"I am satisfied," returned Jessie, frankly. "If my poor heart, with all its faults, as well as its affections, is of value in your eyes, it is yours. Yes, William," she added, stopping, and turning towards him a look of the fondest regard, "I will be your wife!"

In a moment his arms encircled her, and he drew her towards his bosom, where she nestled most confidingly. It was a period of exquisite silence not to be broken by words. He bent his head and imprinted the first kiss on her lips. A sob of happiness was the only sound that was heard as thus they remained in a long, firm embrace; and then did Ainslie lift up his head to where the moon beamed down upon them from her blue throne on high. He lifted it up, and called upon the great Father above to smile upon them, and give them his blessing. There, under that solemn starry canopy, did these two young healthy hearts swear devotion to each other, and promise to be true. But promises were unnecessary. They had full and unlimited confidence in each other, knew the high principles of each other's nature, and therefore feared not for change or unfaithfulness. On his side all was manliness and candour; on hers, all free unhidden acknowledgment. She was above the usual silly bashfulness of maidens. Her choice, she knew, was a worthy one, and she was not ashamed to own it; but while strained closely to that generous heart, and hung over by that noble countenance, she feared not to tell how dear he was to her—how, from the hour she first beheld him, she admired him, and how at that moment she loved him with the deepest love.

O earth! earth! toilsome and soul-wearying as thou art, there are moments spent on thy surface which redeem all thy other hours of wretchedness—moments when the old Eden happiness comes back, and human hearts are filled with balmy drops of gladness. Such moments were those now passed by William Ainslie and Jessie Melville, as they sauntered back and forward beneath the old elms, looking joyously into the fair future that was opening before them.

Brilliant and fascinating was that scene, as it spread itself out before their eyes—a landscape of sunshine and glory, serenity, and love. Alas, for human picturings of life's scenery! Very soon did clouds and shadows gather around their path. For the one there came even on the morrow a sharp fiery ordeal, and for the other was speedily prepared a thorny path of suffering and self-sacrifice.

for you. Have you had no thoughts on this matter yet?"

"Well, I must say I have," answered William, with a laugh and a slight blush.

"I thought so," resumed his father, with a pleased look; and at your age it is a very proper matter for consideration. I have no idea of very young men entering the married state. The position is too important to be assumed without prudence and mature judgment; but you are now, I consider, old enough and wise enough to occupy it."

"I am truly glad you have such an opinion of me, sir," rejoined Ainslie; "for, to tell you the truth, I meant to speak to you in a day or two on this very matter. The fact is, I wish to marry as soon as convenient for all parties."

"My dear boy, I am delighted to hear it," exclaimed Sir William, rubbing his hands with great animation. "The happy event can take place after we are properly settled at Broomfield Park. The old house at the Grange can be easily put in order for your accommodation, and we will be within easy riding distance of each other. But has Grace consented to this sudden completion of her happiness?"

"Grace!" echoed William, with a fixed look at his father.

"Yes, Grace," continued his parent. "Has she given you to suppose that she is willing to have the ceremony performed so soon?"

"I do not understand you," said William. "Do you allude to my cousin?"

"Of course I do; who else but your cousin could I allude to?"

"O but, sir, you are mistaken. The lady I refer to is not Grace;" and William smiled at the error into which his father had fallen.

"Not Grace?" echoed Sir William in his turn, while a look of blank amazement showed itself on his face.

"No," replied Ainslie. "Grace and I have always been very good friends, but nothing more. The thought of marrying her never crossed my mind—indeed, I never thought of marriage at all till within the last few months, because I was never in love till then." And he again laughed, partly at his own words, and partly at his father's bewildered stare.

"And who is the lady to which you refer?" asked the latter, as soon as he had recovered from the shock.

His son replied by narrating the incidents we have detailed in the preceding Chapters. Sir William listened, like one thunderstruck. He offered no interruption, but sat like a statue, astonishment evidently keeping him silent. But when the youth concluded by confessing the engagement of the preceding night, he suddenly burst out vehemently—

"Good heavens! sir, are you mad?" he exclaimed, while a wrathful expression gathered on his brow.

"I hope not," returned William, puzzled to account for his father's anger. "Why should you think so?"

"But you are not in earnest?" continued Sir William. "You don't really mean to say that the most distant idea of *marrying* this obscure girl ever entered your head?"

"No, sir," answered Ainslie, somewhat indignant at the contemptuous manner in which his father alluded to Jessie; "I never had the most *distant* idea of it. When the idea did come, it was very near and close indeed—in short, sir, it is my strongest desire."

Sir William sat upright in his chair, and gazed fixedly at his son. At length he seemed to realize the fact that he was actually in earnest, and, in the calmness of rage, said, slowly—

"Well, what do you mean to do?"

"Make Jessie Melville my wife," was the reply.

"Are you resolved on that?"

"Certainly. Have I not told you that I have promised to her to do so?"

"You are perfectly resolved upon it?"

"Perfectly. Why should you doubt it, or why should it be otherwise?"

Sir William's face absolutely grew livid, his mouth was firmly compressed, his eyes flashed fire, and, starting up and clenching his hand in the other's face, he thundered forth—

"This marriage shall never take place."

Amazed at such outrageous conduct, William drew back his chair, and rising, confronted his father. He was getting angry, but still he was puzzled by such violence, and he asked, while his eye steadily gazed into the excited orb of his parent—

"And why shall it never take place?"

"Why!" roared Sir William; "have you to inquire why? Do you think for a moment that my family is to be disgraced by such a base union as this? Is the blood of the Ainslies to be contaminated by the impure puddle of a peasant? Can the head of such a noble house ever mate with a low, artful, designing wretch, that——"

"Stop, sir," interrupted his son, angrily; "slander not a person of whom you know nothing. Did I not inform you of her goodness and her worth, her——"

"Yes; but did you not also inform me that she was the daughter of my butler, that her mother was your mother's waiting-maid?"

"That I do not deny; but where is the incompatibility of worth and respectability with such a parentage? If the

girl is well educated, intelligent, pure, and affectionate, what matters it who her parents were, or what was their position in life?"

"It matters everything, sir," said Sir William, sternly. "It is an infringement of social arrangements, so preposterous, that none but a fool or an idiot would ever contemplate it. Whatever may be the character of this girl, however good and virtuous she may be, she is but a peasant's daughter, and cannot, therefore, be the wife of a baronet's son."

"I am sorry, sir, that you and I do not hold similar views on this subject. I admit that, as a rule, it is not advisable for people to marry below their station, because every station has its mental characteristics; and it seldom occurs that a couple who have moved in different spheres, are suited, either in habits, tastes, or sentiments for each other—so that a union in such circumstances would be productive only of misery. But it is not impossible that one person, born in a certain sphere, may receive an education fitted for another sphere, and in that case there can be no impropriety in such a person being placed in the higher sphere, which she is capable of filling. The case of the lady to whom I am engaged is exactly of this nature; and since I find her fitted to make me happy, I shall not trouble myself with scruples which are equally silly and unjust."

"You talk very independently, sir," said Sir William, who vainly strove to conceal his impatience while listening to such sentiments. "Pray, have you considered whether you are in a position to carry your resolution into effect?"

"You mean to say, I suppose, if you should be cruel enough to cast me off penniless, should I fulfil my engage-

ment, how am I to support myself and my wife? This I cannot at present answer; but do not suppose that such a threat will make me false to duty. I have sufficient faith in Providence to believe that we would not altogether starve—nay, I flatter myself that, with the education I have, I could follow some employment by which we might live comfortably, if not very respectably.”

“Oh, turn clerk or shopman—perhaps porter or scavenger,” said Sir William, with a sneer. “It does all very well to talk about it just now, but when it comes to be a reality, it is a very different matter. However, I doubt not, you will come to your senses by-and-by, and marry Grace. My long-cherished plan must on no account fall to the ground. We will talk no more about the matter at present. When you resolve to follow my wishes, you may seek me in this room. I spend all my mornings here.”

And the stately baronet, who, during the latter part of the conversation, had stood with his back to the fire, motioned to his son to depart, with all the dignity of a monarch dismissing his subject from his presence. But William was not thus to be treated even by his father. He was prepared to show him all due respect and obedience; but when, as now, he was disposed to trample on his dearest affections, he felt the call of a higher duty commanding him to stand out and protest against the foul wrong. Instead, therefore, of leaving the room, he continued standing by the side of the table, and in answer to his father's last words, he said—

“Do not mistake my character, father. No amount of consideration will ever cause me to forsake the girl to whom I have pledged myself. I hold wealth and rank too cheap to let that thought weigh with me for a moment. So you

may, with all safety, consider my present decision as my final one."

Sir William was now enraged beyond control. He rushed through the room like a madman, overturning chairs and tables in his way, giving vent to curses and anathemas against his rebellious son. The latter stood calmly looking on, his strongest emotion being that of pity. It was melancholy to him to see his father so moved by such mean, worldly considerations, a man otherwise so sensible and benevolent. Ah! he little knew the importance Sir William attached to family consequence, or the deep-seated ardour with which he had cherished the matrimonial scheme, which now he saw frustrated. It was in reality his great life plan. To accomplish it he had laboured and contrived while his son was yet an infant; it had been his day-dream ever since; and now to have it suddenly dispelled, and such a rude reality substituted for it, was more than his imperious and aristocratic nature could bear.

Ajuslie, seeing this degrading exhibition of passion, was about to leave the room, but his father sprang forward and grasped him by the breast.

"Stop, sir," he exclaimed fiercely; "you do not leave the spot till you apologize for your insolence, and promise to marry your cousin."

"Marry my cousin, and desert my betrothed! where would my honour be then? Father, it is you who would bring disgrace upon our family, by counselling your son to be a villain, placing, forsooth, a paltry pedigree and a worthless genealogy before truth and justice, and manly faith! For shame, sir; for shame! If you can forget yourself thus, I cannot; and rather than comply with your base desire, I would work for my bread by the commonest and hardest

labour. Let me go from you now, and if you wish it, for ever."

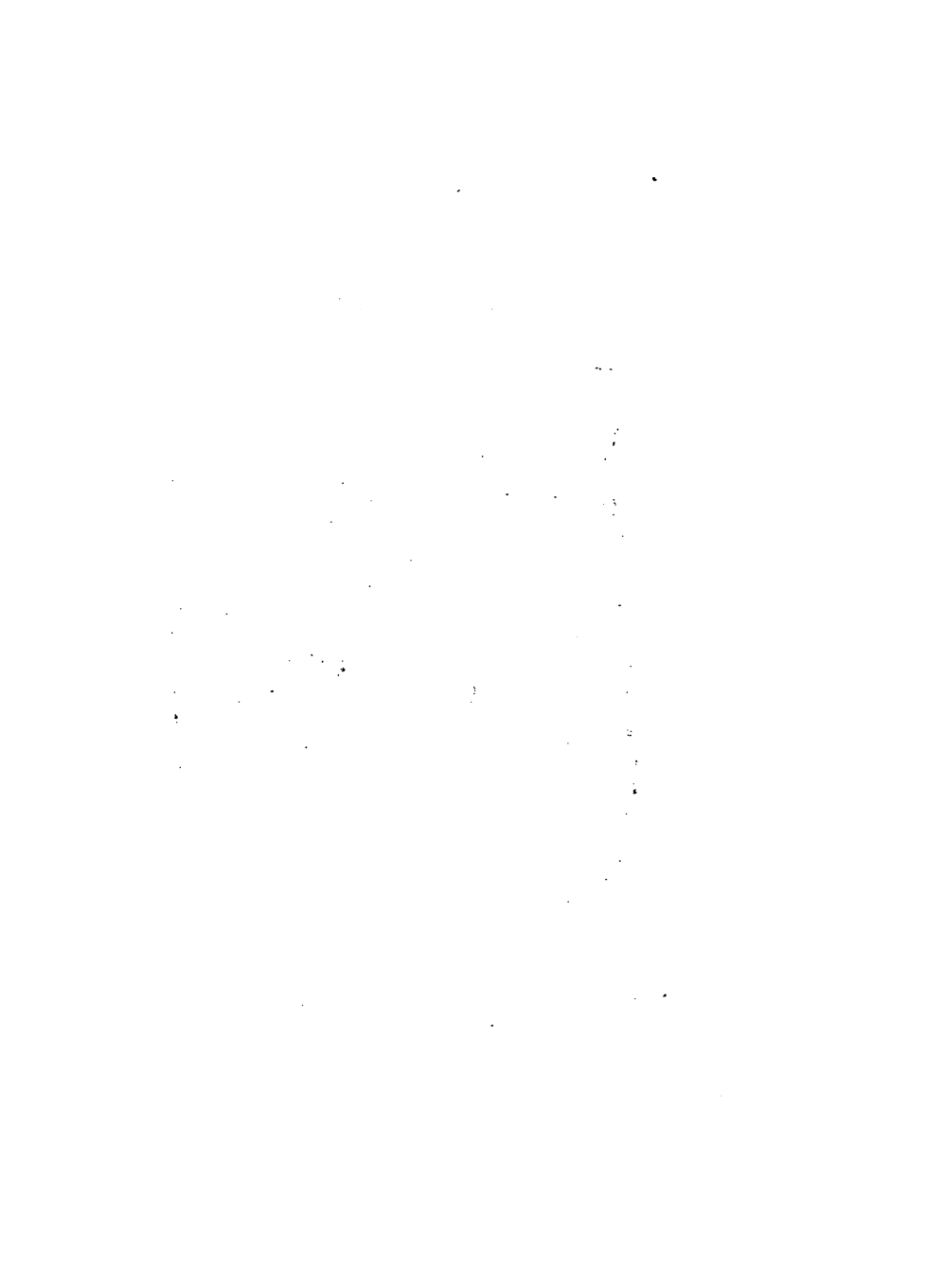
Blinded by passion and rage, Sir William, instead of quitting his grasp, clutched at his son's throat with his other hand, evidently intending to strangle him. Had Ainslie been less powerful he might have succeeded, for his assault was sudden and very desperate; but he was a strong youth, and with a violent effort he forced his father to release him. They struggled and wrestled on the floor till the centre table was overturned with a crash that brought Lady Ainslie into the room. A servant or two was about to follow her, but seeing the position of her husband and son, she had sufficient presence of mind to forbid them, and hastily closing the door, she stood in amazement awaiting the issue.

Her presence calmed Sir William somewhat, and he sank into a chair, burying his face in his hands. Ainslie, in answer to the wondering look of his mother, said it did not become him to explain what she had seen, but that he would quit the room, and leave his father to make the necessary revelations. And before either of them had time to stop him, he rushed into the lobby, seized his hat, and hurried from the house.

To explain the cause of Sir William Ainslie's violence on this occasion, it is necessary to go back somewhat in the family history. Sir William was not the eldest, but the second or youngest son, and succeeded to the title and estates on the death of his brother, who died a bachelor. He had one sister, who was married to Colonel Fergusson of the Grange, a place about five miles from Broomfield Park. Shortly after this he himself married a lady of a good but reduced family, and the two households lived on very good terms with each other. As we have already stated,



"They struggled and wrestled on the floor, till the centre table was overturned with a crash that brought Lady Ainslie into the room."—Page 52.



family pride and consequence was Sir William's *Alpha* and *Omega*; he therefore earnestly desired a male heir, to transmit the name and title to future generations. It was some years after his marriage ere this desire was gratified; but at length, to his infinite joy, his lady presented him with a son. Finding it necessary, in order to preserve the estate entire, to reside for a time abroad, he broke up his establishment, and went with his wife and son to a chateau near Paris. Previous to this, however, his brother-in-law, Colonel Fergusson, died, leaving an only daughter. The widow, for the sake of her child's education, removed to Edinburgh, and was there when Sir William departed to Paris.

An idea, however, had by this time entered the baronet's mind, which was no less than the marriage of his son and niece. This would unite the two estates, and make the name and family of Ainslie the highest in the county. To accomplish this, he sent his son to be brought up with his aunt in Edinburgh, trusting that the youthful association of the two cousins would in due time ripen into love, and thus the marriage of convenience would have a basis in affection. He never doubted that matters would run in this desirable channel. When, therefore, he learned that not only had his son no love for Grace, but had actually engaged himself to another—and this a low-born, penniless girl—and was fixedly resolved on marrying her, the terrible disappointment caused him to give way to the rage which we have described.

We return to Ainslie, who, when he rushed into the street, wandered on he knew not whither. To a nature like his, the stormy scene with his father, and the unworthy earth-born considerations, together with the base proposals he had made to him, came with a saddening power. From

his high view-point he could see the utter littleness of the motives which actuated Sir William, and he sighed to think that one so gentlemanly should yield to such spurious ideas. He loathed, utterly loathed, the temptation that had been placed in his way, and before which it was expected he should fall. The very thought that his father hoped he would forsake Jessie and marry his cousin, for the sake of rank and wealth, maddened him, and he sped on as if to get quit of the hideous idea.

On leaving the house he had turned west, and in a few minutes had passed along the Dean Bridge, and pursued his aimless way on the Queensferry Road. He passed several people, but saw them not, being too deeply and sadly absorbed in his own reflections. On he went, farther and farther, till at last the fresh western breeze cooled his heated brow, and drove some of the despairing thoughts from his heart. Looking up, he beheld the grey towers of Craig Crook and the dark Hill of Corstorphine rising behind them. On that woody eminence he strolled about all the day, thinking what course to adopt—whether to tell Jessie at once of what had occurred, or wait to see if his father would return to better and more Christian feelings. He resolved on the former, as the shades of early twilight descended on the hill, and he slowly took his way back to the city, the lights of which were beginning to show themselves. In his excitement, he had tasted nothing all the day; but now, like that Divine Man who spent forty days and nights on another hill in the far-off land of Palestine, wrestling, too, with temptation, he felt “an hungered.” It wanted, nearly, two hours of eight, when he reached the west end of Princea Street; he therefore repaired to a public-house in the Grassmarket, where he got some refreshment, and

stretching himself on the long settle before the fire, was soon fast asleep.

Eight o'clock was pealing all over the city when he awoke; so, hastily jumping up, he paid his little reckoning, and, in a few moments, was half-running up the Bow, fearful that he would be too late to meet Jessie when she left the work-room. He reached the accustomed corner, but no Jessie was there; he darted down the close, but the windows of the folding-shop were dark; he was then too late—she must be away home. He proceeded down the Canongate, entered the well-known alley—dark as ever, but now familiar as a home—and made his way up the long stair. A light streamed from Mrs Melville's open door; several forms glided to and fro in the little apartment. He entered it. Everything was hung with white. Jessie sat in a corner with her face concealed by her hands. *Mrs Melville was dead!*

CHAPTER V.

DEATH-BED REVELATIONS.

ABOUT the very time that William Ainslie entered his father's library, on the morning referred to in last Chapter, Jessie Melville was going home to breakfast. Having let herself in with her latch-key as usual, she was surprised to find her mother still in bed, the fire unlighted, and no preparations for the morning meal.

"Jessie, is that you?" was spoken by her mother in a feeble voice from the bed.

"Yes, mother," was the reply. "Are you unwell this morning, that you are not up?" and she proceeded anxiously to the bedside.

"O, I'm very ill," responded Mrs Melville, in a strange, unnatural tone; "very ill indeed, and I doot I'll never be better."

Greatly alarmed, the young girl drew aside the curtains, and beheld her mother in a state of great mental excitement.

"What is the matter?" she exclaimed hurriedly. "Where do you feel pain?"

"Oh! here," answered the sufferer, placing her hand on her left side, and groaning heavily.

"Shall I go for a doctor?"

"It wad maybe be as weel, though I fear he can dae me

nae guid. I think I ken what's the matter wi' me, and if I'm richt, a' the doctors in Edinburgh canna save me."

Jessie was gone ere she had done speaking, and returned in a few minutes with a kind-looking middle-aged gentleman, well known in the district for his professional skill and large benevolent heart. He went forward to the bed, felt the patient's pulse, asked a few questions, and sadly shook his head.

"Dinna fear to tell me the warst, sir," said Mrs Melville, looking earnestly up in his face. "If I'm dying, as I believe I am, it is of great importance that I should ken."

"Dying!" echoed Jessie, with a wild cry; "O, mother, talk not in this way. Surely, sir," she continued, turning to the doctor pleadingly, "you cannot think that death is coming? It is but a fainting fit; she has had several of late."

The doctor answered Jessie's pathetic appeal with a sad, tender look. "My dear young lady," he said, "I wish I could comfort you with words of hope, but it is impossible. Your mother's disease is in the heart, and, if I read the symptoms rightly, she can live only for a few hours longer. I can give her something to relieve her of pain, in some degree, but the swift messenger is on his way—he will be here soon, and will claim his own."

In an agony of grief, Jessie threw herself on the bed, and clasped her mother in her arms.

"Dinna tak on sae, my bonnie bairn," said Mrs Melville, sadly; "it's the will o' Providence, and we maun submit. Praise be to His name that he hasna called me away in a moment, for then I shouldna hae done the justice which I can yet dae. Maybe it's a sign that my penitence is accepted, and my great sin blotted out. You say I may live for some hours yet?" she continued, turning eagerly to the doctor.

"Yes, that is my opinion," returned he, "but do not excite yourself so much. If I mistake not, mental distress of a severe kind has hastened the issue."

"You are perfectly right, sir," said the invalid, with a sigh; "but it's past noo. My burdened heart, that has lang held its dark secret when conscience wanted to draw it out, has yielded at last, and the battle's ower. Nae mair will I suffer the pain that for months has burned in my breast, and aebody kenn'd but mysel. Weel, weel, wrang daein' canna escape punishment, and, if I've sinned, I've suffered. But it's ower noo, it's ower noo. The wrang shall be made richt, and then it matters not hoo sune the swift messenger you speak o' comes for his ain."

The good doctor said nothing to these strange words. He saw there was a mystery and a sin alluded to; but it was evidently to others, and not to him, that the revelation was to be made. He sought not, therefore, to intrude upon the sorrows and confessions of the penitent; but giving the dying woman some medicine, and leaving more to be administered at intervals, he took his departure, kindly but firmly refusing the fee that Jessie would have forced upon his acceptance.

Scarcely had he gone, and the poor girl returned to the bedside, than Mrs Melville, in a calm, steady voice, the result evidently of a high and holy resolution, thus addressed her:—

"Sit doon, Jessie, and listen to me, for I hae a terrible story to tell; and, oh! if after you hear it you canna forgie me, dinna curse me; for I'm dying, and it's an awful thing to be chased oot o' the warld by the curses o' them we hae wranged. Promise me this, my sweet lassie. I deserve your anger, and daurna look for your pardon; but your re-

proaches wad be ill to thole in my last moments—you that I hae loved and doated on for five-and-twenty years. Oh promise me, Jessie, that you winna curse me whan you ken what I hae to tell ?”

Utterly bewildered by these words, Jessie could only look with amazement on her mother's face. “Curse you, mother !” she said, “for what should I curse you ?” Have you not been the best and kindest of mothers to me ? have you not striven beyond your power to educate me above my station ? and ——”

“Stop, stop,” interrupted Mrs Melville ; “It's true I hae done my best to make you fit for another rank, and maybe that will help now to set things richt ; but for a' that, I hae deeply wranged you, as you will sune learn. Only, I wad like to hear you say that you will no kill me wi' reproaches, for oh ! reproaches frae your lips wad kill me.”

“Unnecessary as such a promise is, my dear mother,” responded Jessie, through her tears, “if it comfort you in any way, I cordially give it. It is impossible that you *can* have injured me to any extent ; but if you had, and a thousand times deeper than your own fancy suggests, never, never, would I utter a reproachful word.”

“Bless you, bless you, my gentle lassie ; it's just like you, aye ready to speak kindly, and spare them that harm ye. Impossible that I hae injured you ! Na, it's no impossible, for, alack, it's ower true. But listen to my words, and let the secret that has been in my breast, and tortured it for twenty-five years, be revealed. But first, gie me some mair o' that medicine, for I find I need it.”

Wondering and altogether at a loss to understand the meaning of such language and hints, the young girl silently handed the medicine to the sufferer, and sat down

close by the bed to await the promised communication. After a few long-draw sighs, and an effort to attain composure, the old woman thus spoke—

“You mind yon Sabbath morning whan—whan William Ainslie cam to his breakfast? I telt him our history. Maist o’t you kenned before, but some o’t ye didna, and the maist important o’t wasna even telt at that time. Last nicht, when your birthdays were spoken about, you seemed surprised that I never telt you that leddy Ainslie and mysel’ had bairns in ae nicht. I had reason for saying naething about it, and, guid kens, a strong reason it was. If Sir William Ainslie desired ae thing mair than anither, it was to hae a male heir, and this a’ the servants kenned. Lang and lang he thought he was to be disappointed, but at last the leddy’s size declared the joyful news. James Melville, and I had been married the year before, and I was in the same way. Weel, on a stormy March nicht, when the wind and rain was beatin’ on the wa’s o’ the auld hoose, and makin the windows rattle, I telt James that he had better gang for the doctor, for I wasna weel. He kenned fine what was the matter, sae he got up and on wi’ his claes, and let himsel oot by the garden door. Everything was quiet in the hoose, for the servants were a’ in bed. My leddy’s bedroom was at the same end, for she expected to be delivered sune, and had come there to be farther frae the noise. It wasna very lang till Doctor Sharp came into the room where I was. James had let him in by the back way, and was haudin his horse at the yett, for he had just come hame frae seein somebody, and hadna time to pit it into the stable. Weel, no mony minutes after, my bairn was born—a fine, strong, healthy-looking son—and the doctor was gaun doon stairs to waukin the house-keeper to dress it, when a cry was heard in my leddy’s room.

The doctor ran in wi' the licht in his hand; and there was the leddy in the same state as mysel. It was a' ower in twa minutes, for it was nae mair than that when the doctor came back to my bed-side wi' her wean in his hands. He seemed awfu putten aboot, but I had little time to notice it, for he laid doon his face to my ear, and telt me in a whisper that the laird had promised him £500 if the bairn was a son. Now, says he, it's no a son, but yours is a son; take you hers, and gie me yours to carry back to the leddy, and I'se gie you the half o' the five hunder. I was bewildered, and believe, if I had gotten time to think, I wadna hae done sic a thing; but before I could say aye or no, the doctor had taen the laddie frae my side, and left the lassie in its place. My leddy, it seems, had been in a faint a' this time, and before she was oot o't the change had been made, and she kenned naething aboot it. When the doctor came through my room again, to rouse the servants, I cried for my bairn, but he bad me, for God's sake, to haud my tongue. It will be as weel taen care o' as if you had it yoursel, he said, and be the laird o' Broomfield Park into the bargain. What needs ye pit yoursel aboot, naebody kens what's been done; and forbye, there's the five hunder that I'll half wi' you. He said nae mair. The next minute the servants came to help baith me and my leddy: and after the thing was done, and naething said, and a' body, Sir William among the rest, was rejoicing about the young heir, I was feared to tell hoo it was, sae I keepit the lassie, and let the leddy hae my ain bairn."

"Merciful heaven!" exclaimed Jessie, who now comprehended the matter; and that girl was——"

"Yoursel, my hinnie, your ainsel. But oh! ye ken, ye promised no to curse me. . . . You are silent, you are cursing me in your heart."

"No, no," said the poor, bewildered girl, "I was only overcome by the strange intelligence. Then William Ainslie is your son?"

"Yes, my ain, my lang-lost bairn. The first moment I saw him, there was something that thrilled through a' my heart, though I hadna seen him since he was an infant. After the family gaed awa to France, I heard nae mair o' him, though wae, wae was I to part frae him. A hunder times I was just on the point o' tellin a' and gettin' my ain back again; but the thought that a son o' mine wad be laird o' Broomfield Park keepit me frae daen it, and I let them gang. O, it was a wicked deed, and sair hae I been punished for it."

It would be impossible to describe the feelings of Jessie Melville (for this name we will still call her) when such an astounding revelation as this was made to her. In the thrill and whirl of excitement, her mind was a perfect chaos; but amid the confusion and distraction, one recollection shone like a gleam of steady light—it was the remembrance that she was betrothed to Ainslie, and, whatever occurred in their social positions, she would not be separated from him. This was a sweet thought, and, under its influence, she threw herself into the outstretched arms of Mrs Melville, as she lay yearning for a word of pardon, and assured her of her entire forgiveness.

"It was a sore temptation," urged the beautiful girl, extenuatingly, and it came and passed so hurriedly; it was more an impulse than a deliberate act."

"I wish I could think sae," murmured the self-accusing one, "but I doot it. It's the knowledge that I'm on my death-bed that has wrung the truth frae me now. Ever since I kenned wha our young friend was, I trembled for fear the truth should come out. Mony and mony a time did I yearn to throw my arms about his neck and tell him I was

his mother, but I hadna the heart to deprive him o' what he has lang thought his rank and title: sae guld and kind as he was to us, when he didna ken onything about us. I was proud o' him, but durstna own him."

"Yes, he is a noble, generous youth," said Jessie, delighted to speak in praise of her lover, "and it would be a pity to see him removed from his high position. He is better able to support the rank than me; let us just remain as we have been."

"In nae case maun that be," said Mrs Melville, with energy. "Truth and justice to a' parties demand that you claim your ain. In that little box on the green table you will find papers to prove your birth. I got an acknowledgment o' the hail matter frae Dr Sharp, and gied him the same, in case it might be necessary, after a', to prove the truth. Last nicht, after you and William gaed out, I sat doon and wrote a short history o' the matter, and signed it, so that a' that ye hae to dae, after I'm awa, is to ca' upon Sir William, your father, and pit the papers into his hand. If he's no satisfied wi' them, he can gang to Doctor Sharp, if he's still living, and he'll tell him that my story is true. I wad send for Sir William himsel, and tell him, but I canna brave his anger in my last minutes. O, sair did I strive to conceal this, and keen was I to prevent it frae coming to light," continued the dying woman, as Jessie sat silent and stupified. "It was the fear o' discovery that garred me no let ye gang to be a governess in Mrs Fergusson's. You are sae like your mother, that I thought the resemblance wad be traced. But it's in vain to work against Providence. Nane need expect to hide sic a secret as mine lang. They may, wi' a sair fecht, do it sae lang as life and health last; but when they come to a bed o' death, they daurna, oh! they daurna carry it ony farther. Speak to me again, Jessie

darling. Let me hear your sweet voice ance mair, for I find I shall no hear it lang."

Jessie again sprang up, and embraced with passionate affection her whom she still called mother, whispering, at the same time, words of comfort in her ear.

"Would you like to see William?" she asked, as the thought struck her.

"Yes," answered Mrs Melville, mournfully; "but there's nae time for that. He'll no be here till eight, and afore that I shall be far awa; and maybe it's better that I shouldna see him again, for he micht look cauldly on me when he kens I'm his mother. O, Jessie dear, break the news gently to him; and when you are in the place he now fills, and he a puir penniless orphan, dinna forget to be kind to him; dinna see him want; mind hoo he brought you hame that nicht in the snaw, and sent a' our things up frae the pawnbroker's, forbye ordering for us plenty, baith at the grocer's and the butcher's."

"And never, never, will I forget it," said the girl, while a glow of enthusiasm flushed her lovely face. "I loved him from that hour; I love him still, and will love him for ever. You are my mother still," she continued, while she hid her face on Mrs Melville's bosom. "Last night he told me he loved me, and asked me to become his wife; I promised, and in the holy moonlight we pledged ourselves to each other. That pledge is as sacred to me, and will be as joyfully fulfilled as before. Still then, O still, you are my mother."

"Father in heaven, I thank thee," faltered Mrs Melville, in accents of gratitude. "This is what I wished for and prayed for. May the dying blessing o' a puir erring but repentant woman rest on you baith! Now I can die happy, far happier than I deserved."

The shock of joy caused by the knowledge of Jessie's engagement to William, was more than Mrs Melville could sustain, and as she uttered these words, she died—calmly, peacefully died. So gently did the swift messenger enter and fulfil his mission, that Jessie, who still lay with her head on her bosom, knew not that the stroke had descended—knew not that she, whom she had always considered her mother, and whom she still loved with all a daughter's affection, was enfolded in the cold, close embrace of death. But the dreadful silence and stillness alarmed her, and looking suddenly up, the fixed and changed countenance met her view. She had never seen death before, but its aspect cannot be mistaken, even by those who look upon it for the first time. The glazed eye, the rigid features, the motionless frame, told her that all was over; and that awe, which steals over the living in the presence of the dead, came upon her, and filled her soul with its solemnity. With a gentle hand she closed the eyes of the corpse, kissed once again the now cold lips, spread the coverlet smoothly over the inanimate form, and withdrew to request the assistance of the neighbours in performing the last sad rites to the deceased.

And so it came to pass, that while William Ainslie traversed with hasty and unheeded steps the slopes of Corstorphine Hill, his betrothed was listening to words of momentous import to them both—words which, when known to all whom they concerned, would entirely change the aspect of affairs, touch with a spell the sinful pride of sinful hearts, and introduce the elements either of new love or increased alienation into the bosoms of the personages of our story.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RESOLUTION.

WE cannot wonder if, on the day of Mrs Melville's death, Jessie's mind was in a very bewildered and chaotic state. The suddenness of the event, and the astounding revelations to which she had listened, threw her into such a state of grief and perplexity, that she was wholly unfit to bear any part in performing the sad duties of the occasion. But the kindness of the neighbours made the inaction of the bereaved girl of little consequence. The Melvilles had been much respected by all the inhabitants of the close; many friends, therefore, came forward to carry out the necessary proceedings, and she was thus saved attempting that for which she was inadequate.

And yet she had a task to do—difficult, arduous, and important. It was necessary to come to some resolution, regarding the strange disclosure made by Mrs. Melville, before William came at night. Was she to reveal the truth at once—disclose her birth, and invert their positions? or would she, for the present, let the knowledge she had acquired remain within her own bosom? This was the question she had to settle in her mind during the afternoon, and, truly, it might be called a "momentous" one. How few girls at her age could deal with such a matter! Any one of less strength of mind and decision of character,

would have at once seized on the splendid advantage placed within her grasp; and, thoughtless of the feelings or circumstances of others, asserted her claims, and demanded her rights.

But Jessie Melville was a thoughtful, considerate, unselfish girl. Had William Ainslie been to her a perfect stranger, she would have felt deeply for him in taking away his rank, and placing him in a low social position. How much more, then, would she hesitate, when she loved him so devotedly—nay, when she had promised to become his wife! To wound such a noble heart as his, to inflict sorrow, on one who had been so generous and kind, who had loved her when he knew her only as the daughter of his father's butler, and had sworn to give up his rank and wealth, if necessary, for her sake. Devotedness such as this surely demanded forbearance, nay, sacrifice, on her part. Love and gratitude alike prompted her to remain silent.

And silent she did at length resolve to remain till they were married. William, she knew, put no value on rank, on birth, and could not be annoyed by the knowledge that his bride was descended from a high family instead of himself; nay, the pleasure it would afford him to know that she had for a time made the sacrifice of silence for his sake, would, she was aware, outweigh any regret he might feel at the loss of worldly station; besides, an immediate discovery of her true parentage and his true parentage, might, for aught she knew, throw obstacles in the way of their union, and this her heart violently protested against.

This, then, was her resolution, after many hours of anxious reflection. Noble and womanly it was, betokening a heart of genuine devotion, a nature eminently feminine and heroic. A woman, when most womanly, is most brave,

Real weakness is not an element of the female character. It is its strength of affection, inciting it to endurance of evil, self-denial, and self-sacrifice, that marks it as genuine and true.

Calmly, then, and composedly, did Jessie rise to receive her lover, when he entered and gazed upon the sad scenes of the chamber of death. He was greatly shocked by the sudden and unexpected occurrence, and could only fold his betrothed in his arms in silence and mute sympathy. At such a time it would have been cruel to mention the rage and violence of his father when he learned of their engagement. This must be put off till a more fitting season. Meanwhile, he asked Jessie about her mother's illness and death; and as he listened to the sad story, they mingled their tears together. Carefully, however, did she omit all reference to Mrs Melville's confession, though she told him how, in her last moments, she had longed to see and bless him. Then looking around and perceiving that the neighbours had left the room, she lifted her tearful countenance to his, and told how she had gladdened the dying one's heart by informing her of their engagement.

"I trust I did no wrong in thus cheering the soul of the departing," said Jessie, seeing a shade as of anguish pass over Ainslie's face.

"Nay, my own Jessie," said William, tenderly drawing her to him, "I'm glad to know that your mother approved of our union. Let us renew our vows to each other by the side of the dead."

And there, in the silent room, by the dead body of his own mother, did William Ainslie swear to cherish and protect through life the weeping girl at his side. And there, too, did she, in the consciousness that the dead one by whose bed

they stood was the parent of him to whom she pledged herself, solemnly promise to be true and constant. It was an impressive moment, and deeply did its sacredness and solemnity come down upon their young hearts.

They were interrupted by the re-entrance of the females, who came to keep watch through the night. When William departed, Jessie asked if he would conduct the arrangements for the funeral, and lay the head in the grave. A warm clasp of the hand was the only but sufficient answer; a parting embrace was exchanged on the dark stair-head, and they separated,—she to sit by his mother's body, he to encounter the frowns of her proud, high-born parents.

The funeral was over. The Canongate Churchyard was the place of interment, and Mrs Melville's head was laid in the grave by her unconscious son. Some days passed over, in which Ainslie frequently visited Jessie in her solitary home, but as yet the scene in the library had not been told. Ever since that morning Sir William had studiously avoided his son. Lady Ainslie grieved over the alienation, for she loved both her husband and her boy. His birth had caused a welcome increase of Sir William's affection for herself; and in addition to maternal feeling, she doubly loved him on this account. She had little sympathy with pride of birth and family consequence which her husband cherished, and was, therefore, not particularly averse to her son's marriage with Jessie, provided she was a good and worthy girl. Of this even, she was satisfied; for she knew William would not have been attracted by anything but mental superiority, purity of character, and warmth of affection. Still, she feared to espouse his cause openly, and could only be a silent spectator of the family difference. To her William had expressed his unalterable resolution of fulfilling his engagement; and her.

own pure, upright heart, could only acknowledge that such was his duty. Yet, it was a severe trial. She knew the unbending character of the baronet, and was convinced that rather than give his consent he would sacrifice his son.

Matters stood thus at Queen Street, when, one bright April afternoon, William entered Jessie's room at the dinner hour (for she had again returned to work), and requested her to have a walk. It was a temptation; and as they were not very busy in the work-room, she consented, and away they went.

They were both very cheerful. The happy influence of the balmy spring day caused their hearts to bound with freedom and delight. The face of the country flushing into green, the songs of the birds, the softness of the air, the brightness of the sky—all tended to animate their spirits, and create a buoyancy within them to which both had long been strangers.

Far away on the Braid Hills, surrounded by whins and the first comings of wild flowers, Ainslie told his betrothed of Sir William's anger and relentless opposition; yet, as he truthfully described the scene, he clasped more closely her slender waist, as if by this silent, yet significant token, he meant to assure her that she was as dear to him as ever, and that, despite the unreasonable and sinful conduct of his father, he would remain true to her, even though he sacrificed all else.

As she listened to the painful recital, her bosom throbbed with mingled feelings of sadness and indignation. "And this," she thought, "is my father—this cruel, stern, unfeeling man, is my father. Ah! little does he know that she whom he thus spurns and contemns is his own and only child; but the day may come when the knowledge shall cause his

haughty spirit to bend, and his hard heart to melt—when he shall yet fold to his heart the poor outcast whom he now despises.”

These bitter feelings, however, gave place to thoughts more gentle and genial when William spoke of the sentiments of Lady Ainslie.

“Here,” she again murmured to herself, “is a mother I can love. How I long to throw myself upon her bosom, and receive her maternal embrace! This, too, may be awaiting me in the happy future.”

“I feared this,” she said, sadly. “From the first moment you spoke of love, I anticipated the opposition of your high-born friends. Such a union as ours would be, is so unequal in the eyes of the world. They do not know, and therefore cannot understand, the higher equalization of the mind; and it is in vain for us ever to expect their consent. But, dear William, she continued, falteringly, “now that you know the price you must pay for being constant to me, do you repent of your engagement? If you do, you may still draw back; the path is yet open for you to——”

“Jessie,” exclaimed Ainslie, reproachfully, “have you such a mean opinion of my character as to think I would forsake you, because the sacrifice of worldly prospects lies before me? Surely, surely, you have a higher idea of him you have sworn to love than your words would indicate. Speak, O speak, and say you but jest.”

“I did indeed jest,” she replied, touched by his ardent devotion. “Full well did I know that yours was a soul above such fears and cowardly feelings. Pray forgive me for my thoughtless words.”

A warm, loving kiss, was the token of pardon and reconciliation; and from that moment a perfect understanding

and unlimited confidence existed between them. William would have at once left his father's house, sought a situation, and taken home his bride ; but to this Jessie would not consent.

"Do nothing rashly," was her counsel. "Let us wait a little, and trust in Providence ; perhaps things may turn out better than they at present appear ; at all events, there is no need for haste. From your fa——, I mean, Sir William's last words, it would appear that he will not again introduce the subject. I would advise you to be equally silent, and treat him with the same respect as before."

He could not but acknowledge the prudence and propriety involved in this advice, and promised to follow it for the present.

"What sort of a person is this cousin of yours—this Grace Fergusson?" inquired Jessie, with something like an arch smile, as they came on to the Newington road. "Now, don't imagine I'm jealous," she continued, with a merry twinkle of the eye ; "but I confess I am curious to know how you failed to fulfil Sir William's expectation by falling in love with her, seeing that you were so long associated together."

"Well, I like my cousin Grace very well," he replied ; "she is a kind-hearted creature, gentle, good-natured, and, I should fancy, possessed of an affectionate disposition ; but it was just probably *because* we have known each other so long, and lived so much with each other, that the idea of marrying her never crossed my mind. I have always looked upon her as a sister, have loved her as such, and do still feel a brotherly regard for her. You would like her, I know, if you knew her ; and she, I am sure, would return the regard, for you are alike in many things, only I don't think she

has such a strong mind and decided character. Your late hardships have given you the advantage of her there; she has not, like you, been disciplined in the school of misfortune."

"Then, had we not met, it is possible that Sir William's plans would have been realized," added Jessie.

"Like enough," was the reply. "Till I saw you, no woman had caught my attention, and my cousin would have been in no way distasteful to me, though I much doubt the possibility of my ever loving her with that ardent affection which a husband ought to cherish towards his wife."

"Poor thing," said Jessie, gently, "I pity her, since my present happiness may have been purchased at her expense."

"Nay," returned Ainslie, "I don't suppose that she, any more than myself, thought of love or marriage. It is not every one who is so kind and partial as you. Possibly she knows too much of me to think of me for a husband."

Jessie smiled incredulously, and mentally wondered how any girl could know William without loving him. Then she reverted to Lady Ainslie, and longed to know something more about her. "Your mother," she said, with an effort, "Is she tall and stately, like Sir William?"

"She is not very tall," he replied, "yet far from being a little woman. Indeed, I have been more than once struck with your resemblance to her——. I beg pardon, did I tread upon your dress?"

"Oh no," said Jessie, who had started at his last words.

"Yes," he resumed, "the resemblance has often appeared to me as very marked. You have the same features, the same expressive eye, and the same winning smile. I could almost fancy that, in her youth, my mother must have been your very image."

"Resemblances are sometimes extraordinary," remarked the girl, though she could understand why in this case it should be so; "but here we are again on the pavement, and this delightful walk, like every other thing, good or bad, is at a close."

"Yes," answered William; "but it has refreshed and strengthened us: it has discovered more of our hearts and natures to each other; its influence will follow us into our different spheres, and cause us to battle more bravely with our lot."

"But what am I to say to Mrs Martin, our forewoman, for being absent this afternoon? Although I am somewhat of a favourite with her, yet she will be sure to scold me."

"O no, it is impossible any one can scold *you*," said Ainslie, fondly. "One of your sweet smiles will cause the sourest and most austere heart to relent."

"Is Messrs Chambers's establishment a very regular one?" inquired he, after a moment's silence. "From what I know and have heard of the two brothers, I should suppose it is very orderly."

"A very model," answered Jessie; "everything is conducted according to rule; and, what is better, the rules are strictly adhered to. This faithfulness to principle, though irksome to new comers, is appreciated by those who have been long in the place, for the regulations are of the most beneficial kind: they relate to the comfort and convenience of the employed as well as to the interests of the employers."

"William and Robert Chambers have been fortunate men. Their *Edinburgh Journal* has been, and still is, I believe, a most successful speculation."

"And worthy are they of their success," said Jessie. "They are kind-hearted and considerate in the extreme."

We seldom see them in the folding-room; but when they do look in, we are sure of a pleasant word and an encouraging smile. Mr William is the freest and most familiar of the two. Mr Robert is more grave and thoughtful; but both are kind, benevolent men."

"Do you think," asked William, musingly, "that any contributions I might send for the periodical would be accepted?"

"I am sure of it," was the reply. "Whatever has merit in it they are sure to insert; and *your* articles, I know, would be worth publishing."

"Ah, you are not a cold, criticising editor, Jessie; but yet I may try. 'Never venture never win,' is an old but very true saying, and I may need the proceeds of such work some day."

"Need it or not," said Jessie, laughing, "it will do you good, and the world good too, to have your fine thoughts in print. How proudly will I fold the sheets that contain your papers!"

"Would you not read them, too?" he asked, banteringly.

"O yes, I would get them all by heart," was the blushing reply.

The great bell of the Tron Church clock now tolled the hour of six right above their heads; and they stopped at the corner of the High Street, for Jessie would not hear of William going home with her. Here, after a few more parting words, they separated, happier and better in all respects for their afternoon's walk.

CHAPTER VII.

GRACE FERGUSSON.

AT John Knox's corner Jessie was overtaken by Mary Richardson, and Richard Sandilands, her sweetheart.

"O, Jessie," exclaimed Mary, with delight, "we were just gaun to seek for you. Richard wants to tak us to the theatre the nicht. Now ye maun gang. You ken you promised to gang wi' us lang syne."

"Yes, Jessie, you canna deny that," said Richard manfully; "and sae I was doon the day at dinner-time, and got three tickets for the pit. 'The Heart o' Mid-Lothian' is gaunna be acted, and Mackay is to be the *Laird o' Dumbiedykes*. What fun we'll get!"

Jessie could hardly refuse such a kind offer. It was seldom, indeed, that she had been in the theatre, though she was very fond of seeing good acting. A Scotch play was, above all, her delight, and the "Heart of Mid-Lothian" was a piece she had often longed to see; so, as Richard had actually got a ticket for her, and as the evening was otherwise an unoccupied one, she agreed to go. Great was the delight of the warm-hearted lovers when she gave her consent, for she was beloved by all her acquaintances, and nothing pleased them better than to get her to enjoy their sports.

At seven o'clock, therefore, the three were elbowing their way up the long passage to the pit of the Theatre Royal.

There was a great crush that night ; but having got tickets previously, they got through with less difficulty, and were in time for a good seat in the middle of the house, and in front of the stage. The pit and galleries were soon filled ; but the boxes, having been taken through the day, were occupied more slowly ; and Jessie and her companions amused themselves, previous to the rising of the curtain, by watching the gay arrivals.

One party, in particular, arrested Jessie's attention. It consisted of an elderly gentleman, two elderly ladies, a young girl, and two children. The gentleman was a tall, fine-looking man, handsome and imposing in his appearance. One of the ladies bore a striking resemblance to him. Any one, in fact, would have thought her a sister, or, at least, a very near blood relation. The other lady was mild and prepossessing in her appearance. Her features were still regular and very pleasant, giving the idea that, in youth, she must have been a beautiful woman. She bore no semblance of being haughty or proud. Her dress was fine, yet plain—neat and good, rather than showy—in short, she seemed a person which all ranks would admire and love ; at least, so thought Jessie Melville, as she looked long and fixedly upon her, after the party to which she belonged had got themselves comfortably seated in their box.

But when she did at length suffer her eye to pass from the old lady, and rest on the face of the young girl who sat by her side, an unaccountable feeling of sympathy and pity filled her heart. The countenance on which she gazed was lovely, but, oh ! how pale ! What a listless melancholy was settled on that fine, intelligent-looking face ! How dull and heavy the eye, and how sad the whole expression ! “ Poor girl,” said Jessie to herself, “ some deep grief is weighing

down your young spirit, and all the heavier that it is concealed. No friend seems to possess your confidence; that sad and solitary air tells me that you sorrow and suffer alone and in secret."

From time to time, as the play proceeded, Jessie cast compassionate glances towards the young creature who had so strongly interested her, and often she wondered who she was, and what the cause of her grief might be. That night Mackay was in capital trim, and gave his *Dumbiedykes* with even more than his usual exquisite finish. The drama interested Jessie greatly, and woke in her breast every emotion, from the deepest sorrow to the most uncontrollable mirth. The sublime heroism of *Jeanie Deans*, the madness and misery of poor *Madge Wildfire*, the royal bearing and generosity of the *Queen*, the rough, yet genuine feeling of *Ratcliff*, the sacred sorrow of *David Deans*, and the "Jeanie, woman," of the love-stricken *Laird*, alternately moved her to laughter and to tears. It was a full house, and heartily did the audience enter into the spirit of the scenes depicted on the stage. Many a tribute of admiration, many a round of applause, did the popular performers receive, indebted for the same as much to the nationality of the play as to their own efforts.

Yet could Jessie notice, that while all enjoyed themselves to the full, the melancholy of the young girl still clung to her. At times a smile flitted for an instant over her face, but it passed away in a moment, and the settled sadness remained. The mimic scene appeared to have little interest for her, and failed to draw her away from the recollection of her darkly-brooding sorrow.

Between the drama and the farce, when the spectators were free to converse among themselves, Jessie was startled to hear a voice behind her say—

"How bad Miss Grace looks the night!"

"Ah, yes!" said another, to whom the remark had been made. "Puir thing, I doot she's in a sair way. She eats naething; and mony a time when I gang into her room, she's sitting greeting like to break her heart."

"What can be the matter wi' her?" asked the other.

"Weel, it's no for me to say," was the reply; "but I've my ain thochts about it. I think Mr William is the cause o't a'; for since ever he went to France to the family, she's never been hersel. To be sure, he's back again; but though he ca's gey often, he doesna seem to haud ony wark wi' Miss Grace forbye ordinar'. Now, ony body wi' half an e'e may see that she's in love wi' him—at least, I'm far wrang if that's no the cause o' her waelooks and lang-drawn sighs."

"What a pity but Mr William could see hoo the land lay," remarked the other. "He'll gang far, and seek lang, afore he meets in wi' sic anither as Miss Grace. They wad answer ane anither to a naething."

"Aye, he's weel worthy o' her, though she has few equals," responded the second speaker. "Mr William is a fine young gentleman—sae kind and sae guid. What a blithe hoose ours used to be when he lived in it! We were a' vexed when he went away; and, to my thinking, the place hasna been the same since syne."

"O Maggie," was the tender rejoinder, after a pause, "what a thing it maun be to love, and no be loved in return! I'm sure, if you hadna telt me that you liket me, I wad hae been in a bonny state. Puir Miss Grace, how I pity her!"

Miss Grace and Mr William! Could it be Ainslie and his cousin to whom the speakers referred; and was the young girl whom she had noticed, and felt so deeply for, no other

than Miss Fergusson? Jessie turned quickly round to see who the parties were whose conversation she had overheard. The female was a young, pretty girl, evidently a house-servant, as her words indeed betokened, and her companion seemed a respectable artisan. They were both looking compassionately towards the box in which the young lady sat, so that there could be no doubt she was the individual referred to. What a whirl of emotions rushed through Jessie's mind! That tall gentleman must be Sir William Ainslie, her father; and the mild, benignant-looking lady, her mother. How noble the one, how winning the other! Who shall tell the nature of Jessie's thoughts and feelings as she gazed for the first time on her parents? Was there ever a situation more interesting than hers? Though she knew that these strangers, whom she never saw before, were her nearest relatives—the authors of her being—yet they knew nothing of her, knew not even of her existence, far less that she was their daughter. Nor might she then make herself known to them. Her love for, and engagement to him, whom they considered their son, had made her resolve to remain silent till after her marriage with William, when, she flattered herself, she would, by a word, change the baronet's opposition and cold contempt into warm paternal affection, and be received with gushing love into the bosom of that tender-hearted looking lady, whom she could then call mother.

Her marriage with William! As this thought dwelt in her mind, it brought a pang with it; and with a glance of agony she looked again on the pale face of Grace Fergusson. True, too true, she saw and knew now the cause of that sad, melancholy countenance. It was unrequited love that lay torturing at her heart. She loved one who knew not of her regard, and therefore returned it

not. And who was the object of her love? Great heaven! it was her own heart's idol, William Ainslie—he who had gained her affection, and loved her in return. She it was, then, she herself, who had been the means of turning Ainslie's thoughts away from Grace, and thus agonizing her with the thought that he whom she adored thought of her only as a brother. As she gazed on the suffering one, she could not refrain from upbraiding and reproaching herself; and to marry William, and see her drooping thus, and suffering so terribly and silently, was a thought she could not bear. At this moment there dawned on her soul the first thought of an awful sacrifice. A victim she perceived there must be. Either herself or Grace must give William up. Who was to bear the tremendous weight of grief? Who but the strongest, who but the one best able to sustain the crushing blow? and that one she shudderingly felt was—herself. That very day had William told her that her advantage over Grace lay in her strength of mind and decision of character. Grace had not been, like her, trained by trial, and disciplined by hardships; she was therefore weaker, and less able to bear up under and overcome the fiery trial. That she would finally sink under it, her present woe-begone and emaciated appearance too plainly showed.

But if she gave up William, she must also for ever keep silent as to her birth. This was a necessary consequence. Loving and adoring him as she did, how could she take away his rank, and claim it for herself? She had resolved to disclose the secret only as his wife, and only as such could she do it. In no other circumstances could she possibly tell him that he was Mrs Melville's son. The one sacrifice, then, demanded and involved the other; but the second was the least, and therefore could be endured. If she relinquished

William, what other sacrifice could she make worthy of the name? Surely, if she could do so much for the sake of Grace, what would she not do for William's sake—for him for whom she was willing to lay down her life? Yet must she, by some means, learn the reality of what she surmised. She must secure Miss Fergusson's confidence, and be fully aware that love for William Ainslie was indeed the cause of her wretchedness, ere she taught herself to tear away her heart-strings from the object to which they now clung. This was a self-sacrifice—the greatest, perhaps, that a human being can make; and its necessity must be clearly demonstrated ere the altar is reared and the consuming fuel piled underneath. Yes, she must get Grace's heart opened before her ere she strung herself to the contemplation of such a terrible achievement. But how was the knowledge to be attained? By what means could she gain the confidence she sought? Let her ruminate for the present on this matter, and by-and-by we shall see the result of her cogitations.

Before the curtain rose for the farce, William Ainslie, who had previously been at the back part of the dress circle, entered the box in which the family were seated. Jessie saw him the moment he appeared, and noted, moreover, the bright gleam which shone in the eye of Grace when he approached her. He seated himself by her side, and treated her in his usual gentle, kindly way; but there was nothing beyond a brotherly familiarity in his manner—nothing to indicate a deeper and holier regard. His attention was soon taken up by the two little girls, who seemed to treat him as an old friend, and one of whom they were very fond. They laughed and chatted with him very briskly, and climbed on his knee till their bright sunny ringlets mingled with his

glossy dark locks. Lady Ainslie looked pleased when he appeared, and frequently regarded him with an anxious yet affectionate look; but Sir William no sooner saw who it was that had joined their circle, than he turned coldly away, and appeared to listen with absorbed attention to the music.

After dallying for some time with the little ones, William chanced to cast his eye over the pit, and noticed Jessie. He started visibly, and fixed on her an earnest gaze. None but Lady Ainslie noticed his emotion, and, following the indication of his eye, she, too, saw the downcast face of the blushing girl. It was strangely troubled by the thoughts into which she had been plunged, and William was pained, nay, shocked, by its anguish. He was about to quit the box and join her, when he was recalled to himself by his mother, who touched him on the arm, and whispered—

“For heaven’s sake, William, recollect where you are.”

He looked at her, and saw that she divined his object and intention. By a mute and significant expression, he showed that she had judged truly.

“You girl is Jessie,” she continued, in the same whisper.

“Yes,” said William, “and she looks strangely troubled; I wish I could learn from her the cause of her pain.”

“On no account do so rash a thing,” counselled Lady Ainslie. “It would bring the eyes of your father and aunt upon you, and lead to fresh quarrels. Be ruled by me,” she pleaded, “and take no notice of her at present.”

He obeyed, so far as remaining in the box was concerned, but during the remainder of the evening his eyes scarcely left her face.

On the other hand, Jessie was miserable. The doings on the stage had no longer any interest for her, and she longed for the termination of the performances, that she might have

opportunity for thought in the silence and solitude of her little room. It was an inexpressible relief, therefore, when the curtain at length descended, amid roars of laughter, and the audience made a rush for the doors. She could not leave the house without casting a glance toward the box. All had left but William, who was standing at the narrow door, gazing earnestly upon her. Their eyes met, and a momentary look of love passed between them; but the next instant Jessie was forced by the crowd into the passage, and she saw no more of her lover.

That night was a sleepless one to Jessie Melville. Poor girl, she was placed in a bewildering position, nor could she ask counsel from any one in her emergency. She could go to no mother for direction, to no father for advice, to no friend for sympathy. In her terrible strait, she must rely upon herself—think alone, resolve alone, and act alone. None but a noble-minded, strong-hearted woman, could carry herself through such an ordeal. Ere the morning light showed dimly on the narrow court, her plans were formed; and, somewhat restored to composure by her decision, she enjoyed two hours of tranquil slumber.

She had hardly finished breakfast, when she was startled to hear the well-known foot on the stair, followed by the equally well-known knock. She opened the door, and in came William with a hurried step. He looked anxiously at Jessie for a few moments, but spoke not; and she was also silent, through alarm, for his air was troubled. At length he said—

“You are surprised to see me so early, but it is of importance that I should see you ere you return to work.”

“Have you come to chide me for being at the theatre last night?” she asked, with a faint smile.

"Nay," he replied; "when I saw Mary Richardson sitting by you, I comprehended the reason of your presence there. But why did you look so wretched? Why even yet do you look so pale and sad? What has caused you this mental distress? Is it any part of my conduct? Have I done aught to grieve you? Have——"

"Nay, nay," interrupted she, with an effort of gaiety; "you are getting imaginative, and the result is, fears entirely groundless. Grieved by your conduct!" she added, fondly, though in a tone of sadness; "how can any one be grieved with you? Be assured you are as dear to me as ever, and as immaculate in my eyes. I confess I was somewhat troubled last night, but did not think my weakness was displayed on my countenance."

"Ah, your countenance is too truthful a one to hide what is passing in the heart—at least, from my eyes. But may I not know the cause of your trouble?"

"Not at present," she replied, with a sweet, ingenuous smile, and a look which told him that it was nothing unworthy, either as regarded him or herself. "Some time or other you shall know all, but at present you must ask no further. Have you sufficient confidence in me for this?"

"Yes, dearest," he answered; "but could I not relieve you of your distress, or aid you to bear it?"

She shook her head, and he was fain to be content. "And was this," she inquired, "the reason of your early visit?"

"Not wholly. My father desires me to depart for Broomfield Park, and superintend the operations going on there, previous to the family removing to the country. His object in this I partly guess. He doubtless thinks that absence from you will tend to the furtherance of his scheme. He does not understand, and therefore cannot estimate the

strength and permanence of an affection like ours. I shall not, however, oppose his wishes; and as I must set off this afternoon, I came to bid you farewell."

"So soon!" she exclaimed, betrayed by the suddenness of the announcement into an emotion which showed the strength of her love.

"Yes, but we must correspond regularly and frequently, and soon, I trust, we shall meet again. But, Jessie dear, will you not now allow me to get some employment more fitted to your taste, and more suited to your talents?"

Her heart bounded. This was a direct futherance of her plans, and she falteringly replied, "I should be most happy to fill a more important sphere, if it were possible. Is your aunt still in want of a governess for her grandchildren? I noticed them last night in the theatre."

"She has not yet got a teacher for them. But would you not feel to enter a place where you may come in contact with my father? He would not, of course, know who you were; but knowing, as you do, his unseemly opposition to our union, would you not feel annoyed at meeting him?"

"I think I could bear it," she replied, with a quiet smile. "The little girls appear so pretty and good, that I think I would delight to have the charge of them; if, therefore, you could procure the situation for me, I would do my best to fill it."

"And you would do it admirably. There is no doubt about that——; but stop, my mother will know you; she noticed you last night, and discovered from my confusion that you were my betrothed."

"Indeed!" said Jessie, greatly moved; "and how did my appearance affect her?"

"Most favourably," answered her lover, "as indeed it

would all right-thinking persons. She expressed herself well pleased with you, thought you pretty, modest, and intelligent; nay, I may tell you that she now actually likes you for my sake."

Jessie could scarcely master the joyful feelings of emotion when she knew that her mother, at least, was her friend, and she was more desirous than ever to be placed in Mrs Fergusson's family, where she would have a chance of meeting Lady Ainslie. "Should the time ever come," thought she, "when I can reveal my secret, how pleasant will it be for my mother to reflect that while yet she knew me only as the poor, obscure girl, she was kind to and befriended me! This will increase our joy in future years, and make our intercourse more sweet and endearing. And if I am fated to keep my secret for ever, the friendship and acquaintance of Lady Ainslie will be some compensation to Jessie Melville for the sacrifice she makes. I may not call her mother, and she may never know that I am her daughter, but to me it will be a solace and a joy to be sometimes near her, to speak to her, perhaps to attend her: yes, I must, for many, many reasons, become a member of Mrs Fergusson's household."

"Do you think," she said, addressing William, "that Lady Ainslie would object to my presence in your aunt's house, knowing, as she does, the engagement existing betwixt us?"

"I should think not," he answered. "From what I know of my mother, and her warm affection for me, I think she would be glad to become acquainted with you in this manner. Of her discretion and secrecy I have no fear. Yes, on second thoughts, I think it is our very best plan. My recommendation will, I think, be sufficient to induce my aunt to engage you, and I shall get the matter accomplished before leaving town. But now, my own Jessie, I must bid you farewell.

My father will be expecting me in the library by this time, and many things which I have to do will prevent me from seeing you again. You promise, however, to write me very often, don't you, love?"

"Yes, I shall most gladly correspond—it will make up in some measure for your absence."

"Farewell, then, and may Heaven bless you," said William, fervently, as he drew her to his bosom, where she hid her weeping face. Long did they remain in this close embrace; but at length, disengaging himself, and imprinting one impassioned kiss on her lips, he rushed from the room.

Intently did she listen to his retiring footsteps; and when they ceased, she threw herself into a chair and gave way to a violent flood of grief. "This may be the last time we shall meet as lovers," she murmured! "but, stay, what weakness is this? Surely this is no mode of entering on that path of sacrifice which lies before me? I must school my heart better to endurance. And yet—yet—'tis hard—very hard to bear!" And again did the noble girl sink down in an agony of bitter, crushing grief.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW HOME.

ON the evening following Ainslie's departure, as Jessie was opening her door, on her return from work, Mrs M'Nab, who lived in the same flat, came out with a letter which had been left with her by the postman. Jessie looked eagerly at the address. It was in a lady's hand, and the first feeling was that of disappointment, for she had hoped it was from William. Opening it, she found that Mrs Fergusson presented compliments to Miss Melville, and would be glad to see her next morning at ten. How wildly her heart beat! On the morrow, then, would her great trial begin. She resolutely forced back the tears that rose in her eyes, and resolved to "screw her courage to the sticking place." Calling up all the energies of her mind, she set her face as a flint towards the prosecution of her unparalleled enterprise. Its grandeur as well as its bitterness rose before her. The form of Grace Fergusson, blooming again in beauty, and radiant with happiness, came to view, as well as the array of her own wrecked hopes, and the sight moved her to the heroic purpose.

Calmly, then, did she, on the following morning, as St Andrew's clock rung out the appointed hour, pull the bell at No. — Heriot Row, on the door of which was neatly engraved the name of Mrs Fergusson. It was opened almost immedi-

ately, and she was ushered into a richly-furnished room, in which was seated the elderly lady she had noticed at the theatre.

"Miss Melville, I presume," said the lady, rising and holding out her hand with a frank cordiality.

A load was removed from the young girl's mind. This kindness put her entirely at ease, and she took the offered hand with mingled freedom and respect, replying as she did so—

"The same, madam; and I am here in obedience to your note of yesterday."

"The object of the requested visit you no doubt guess," said the lady, smiling. "My nephew's report saves all preliminary inquiries, and I assure you I am very glad to have got a proper guardian for my grandchildren.

"You seem to put implicit faith in Mr Ainslie's judgment," answered Jessie, with a self-possession amazing to herself, but for which she was entirely indebted to Mrs Fergusson's gracious manner.

"Yes, I feel perfect confidence in his recommendation," was the reply. "I am quite prepared to install you without any further inquiry, so, if you are agreeable, I will introduce you at once to your pupil. I cannot, of course, expect you to begin duty to-day, but if you can now spare a few hours, and spend them in getting acquainted with the little girls, I shall feel obliged."

Jessie was delighted with the openness and free, gentle manner of her new protectress, and intimated her willingness to comply with the request. On the other hand, Mrs Fergusson was much pleased with Jessie—her pretty countenance, modest yet possessed demeanour, genteel figure, and winning manner, quite captivated her, and she rejoiced

sincerely in having procured such a fitting instructress for the two orphans.

Leading her guest up stairs, and ushering her into a neat bed-room, she assisted her to lay aside her bonnet and shawl, and, with her own hand, brushed and smoothed her beautiful hair; then, gazing on her with something like motherly pride, she exclaimed—

“Upon my word, Miss Melville, you are a handsome creature. Nay, don't blush, I never flatter. But you remind me so strongly of a near relative of mine, as she appeared many years ago, that I cannot refrain from noticing it. There, you have her very smile, too. How marvellous the likeness!”

Despite her efforts to appear unconcerned, Jessie's face flushed deeply at this remark, and she began to get frightened on account of her evident resemblance to her mother, for she could not doubt that Lady Ainslie was the relative referred to. Yet it was impossible, she thought, that such a resemblance, marked though it was, could lead to a discovery of the truth. The real fact was so very unlikely to occur to any of them, that, after a moment's thought, her uneasiness on that head departed.

Leaving the room, and passing along a wide passage, Mrs Fergusson opened the door of another chamber. “This is the nursery,” she said. “Oh, here are your two pupils. Come, my dears, and shake hands with your new governess, Miss Melville.”

Gravely anxious were the faces of the little ones, as they looked behind their grandmamma, to get a glimpse of their promised teacher. Jessie stepped forward with both her hands stretched out towards them, and a smile—her own sweet smile—on her face. A glance was enough to re-

assure the timid girls. Both of them came forward, with a bright laughing eye, and put their hands within the friendly palms held out to them. Jessie stooped down and kissed them affectionately. It was the unsealing of a new fountain of love and friendship. At that moment the hearts of the two beautiful orphans became twined round that of the young girl who had come to take charge of them, and hers went out towards them with a tender devotion.

Mrs Fergusson, seeing the introduction so happily effected, retired, saying that she would leave them together to get their acquaintance perfected. In two hours, when she returned to call them down to dinner, she found things arranged on a most satisfactory footing; Anna and Ellen, as the two girls were called, were as happy as two queens—the former sitting on a stool, with her head in Jessie's lap, and the latter with her arms round her neck, and her cheek nestling in her bosom, both listening with delighted attention to a story which their governess was telling them.

"O grandma!" they both exclaimed, "how glad we are to have Miss Melville beside us! Will she always stay with us, grandma?"

"If you are very good and obedient, perhaps she may stay with you a long while," said Mrs Fergusson.

"O yes, yes," exclaimed the young creatures in a breath, and down they tripped hand in hand with Jessie to the dining-room.

"We have but one visitant to-day, Miss Melville," remarked Mrs Fergusson, as they came down stairs. "Lady Ainslie called to inquire for Grace, who has been rather poorly for some time, and I have prevailed on her to stay and dine with us."

In the midst of the confusion into which she was thrown

by this announcement, Jessie entered the dining-room, and was introduced in due form to her mother and Miss Fergusson. Lady Ainslie advanced to meet her with alacrity, and bent on her a kind though peculiar look, which, with the significant manner in which she grasped her hand, told at once what she knew, and the sympathy she felt for the betrothed of her son. Jessie, doubtless, had strange feelings on the same point, but different thoughts and emotions beyond mere female delicacy wrought strongly in her bosom. For the first time she approached and spoke to her mother—her already loved but altogether unconscious mother. Her agitation was extreme, and did not pass unnoticed by Lady Ainslie, but she attributed it to the first cause mentioned, and strove, by additional kindness, to dissipate her confusion. The little girls, who still kept their place by Jessie's side, afforded a pretext for putting both parties at their ease.

"You and your pupils have already become friends, I perceive," she said, and stooped down to kiss them. "Do you like Miss Melville?" she continued, addressing little Ellen, at the same time taking her on her lap.

Jessie did not hear the artless reply, for at this moment Grace stepped forward from the corner in which she had been sitting. "I am happy to make Miss Melville's acquaintance," was her salutation, in a low, musical voice.

"This is my daughter," explained Mrs Fergusson. The two young girls, whom fate had destined to cross each other's path so unfortunately, shook hands as if they had been old friends. Jessie's appearance won at once on the sensitive Grace; and Grace's pitiable condition, suspected almost to certainty by Jessie, rendered her an object of deep and tender commiseration, though its practical enforcement would cost her so dear.

The party now sat down to dinner, and a general conversation put its various members at their ease. Jessie, however, now felt the disadvantageous influence of her former position. Though provided by Mrs Melville's care with a good education, comprising among other things a year's boarding-school experience, yet she had never entered what is termed good society—at least the kind of society in which she was now to move—and a certain awkwardness, amounting in some instances to ignorance of forms and etiquette, surrounded and cramped her movements. But a strong sense of propriety, which she inherently possessed, served her at this juncture in good stead; and she managed to act so as not to draw the notice of those around her to her inexperience, besides, by carefully watching their actions, laying in a stock of useful knowledge for the future.

Before dinner was over, she had again to feel a thrill of terror on account of "the striking likeness."

"Grace, my dear," exclaimed Mrs Fergusson to her daughter, who sat at the other side of the table, "Don't you think Miss Melville resembles Lady Ainslie very much?"

"Extremely, mamma. I noticed the likeness the moment she entered the room."

"There, I told you so," said her mother, turning to Jessie, triumphantly.

Poor Jessie could only smile, and blush, and glance timidly to Lady Ainslie, who seemed pleased at the idea.

"I fear you flatter me," said the latter lady; "I had no idea that I was half so handsome as Miss Melville."

"Not now," exclaimed Mrs Fergusson; "but I assure you that when you were Miss Dundas, you and Miss Mel-

ville were as much like each other, as it is possible for two persons to be. Time has changed you considerably, but even yet the resemblance is sufficiently marked to attract general notice. Grace, you see, detected it, though she never saw you in youth."

"O, don't imagine that I have any wish to scout your opinion," said Lady Ainslie, playfully; "I am too gratified by it to wish it erroneous. But Miss Melville will be displeased with herself when she finds that she is likened to an old woman such as I am."

"If I should by any means become as like Lady Ainslie in character, as it seems I am in person," said Jessie, who now felt herself forced to speak, "I shall consider the height of my ambition reached."

"Nay, now you do flatter me," cried Lady Ainslie, delighted with the modesty of her words, and more than ever inclined to sympathize with William's resolution to fulfil his engagement.

Fortunately for Jessie, the conversation changed in another direction, and her glowing cheeks had cooled, and her self-possession returned, when Mrs Fergusson inquired at what hour Mr Ainslie had departed for Broomfield Park on the previous Tuesday evening. Jessie's eye caught a glance of Grace's countenance, and saw the animation which the mention of William's name had occasioned. The usual paleness had given place to a deep red; the eye, so languid, had brightened up, and other signs showed themselves, by which she knew that secret and unreciprocated love was indeed gnawing away her existence.

The afternoon passed cheerfully away, and, after an early tea, Jessie took leave of her kind friends, and returned home to make arrangements for her permanent residence in the

family. These were all completed by the end of the week, and on the following Monday morning she took up her abode in her new home, and entered on its duties, its pleasures, and its trials.

Days and weeks passed on, and though she attended faithfully to the discharge of her duties to the orphans, yet she never forgot her real object in gaining admission into the household. In a very few days Grace and herself had become warm friends. The poor love-stricken girl early learned to lean on the stronger mind and equally tender heart of the young governess. In her she found a companion who was ever gentle and kind: on her bosom she could lean her aching head, and find something like rest. But the passion that was destroying her she could not quench; it burned on as ardently and consumingly as ever, and day by day she grew weaker and thinner. Her mother grew alarmed, and consulted the family physician, but his skill and penetration were alike baffled. Change of air and scene was the only thing he could recommend, and this Grace would not hear of. She clung to Edinburgh with a strong devotion, for there she could enjoy the delicate attentions of Jessie, and these she felt to be the only solace of her miserable, sunless existence.

Lady Ainslie and Jessie drew very closely together. The more her ladyship saw her son's betrothed, the greater grew her eagerness to forward the union. Any difference of station was, in her estimation, fully made up by the high qualities which the girl possessed—qualities which none surpassed in the higher circles in which she moved, and which no worldly rank could bestow or compensate for. Fondly, too, did Jessie meet the cordial advances of Lady Ainslie—not because she was the reputed mother of William, and there-

fore to be flattered and pleased; O, no! the heroic purpose which the young self-sacrificing girl nurtured in her soul made her infinitely above such a method of angling—but because she knew her to be her own mother, and therefore to be loved with all a daughter's affection.

With Mrs Fergusson, too, Jessie was an especial favourite. Her unvarying good humour, faithfulness to her duties, and willingness to assist or oblige, but, above all, her unfailing attention to the drooping Grace, served to win for her the high and enduring esteem of the amiable and good-hearted sister of Sir William—*her own aunt*.

In every respect but one, her situation at Heriot Row was comfortable and pleasant. Among the frequent visitors there, was Miss Bridget Ainslie, a distant female relative of Sir William, and one who cherished with, if possible, a more offensive tenacity, all his notions of family pride and aristocratic superiority. With all her pride, however, she was poor, and dependent on the baronet for support, in whose household she had a permanent residence. Seeing the universal esteem in which Jessie was held—a poor, obscure governess, belonging to no “family,” and utterly oblivious of a “pedigree”—she thought it her duty to treat her with contempt and insolence, in case, as she said, the girl should forget herself and her mean position. On all convenient occasions—though privately, for fear of the others—she endeavoured to mortify and humble her, taking frequent opportunities to lecture her on the danger of giving way to pride, and never failing to remind her of her low birth, and, therefore, low prospects and limited rights.

This annoyance Jessie bore with a silent, outward indifference—conscious, of course, that, did birth really confer greatness, she had the power at any time to make Miss

Bridget "sing small." She was above resenting the insults she received at the hands of the officious spinster; but, it must be confessed, she felt angry and indignant at times, and by looks, if not by words, shamed her into silence.

Early in May, the Ainslie family left town for Broomfield Park; and as Miss Bridget accompanied them, the annoyance for the time ceased, though Jessie would have willingly endured it if the company of Lady Ainslie had been spared her. Her departure she deeply regretted, for in her society the bitterness of the sacrifice, which she now saw was inevitable, was somewhat alleviated. Sir William himself she had never met. He cared not now to visit his sister, since he was thereby reminded of his son's obstinacy, and the defeat of his darling plan. The idea of yielding never entered his mind. His pride presented an effectual barrier to *that* idea; so that if he continued silent on the sore subject, it was only because he was "nursing his wrath to keep it warm."

Meanwhile, Jessie's little pupils improved rapidly under her care. They progressed daily in every desirable direction. Their moral and religious, as well as intellectual culture, was carefully attended to; and, under the genial sunshine in which they basked, they blossomed into loveliness, virtue, and beauty.

We have already said they were orphans; and, alas! it is seldom that the region of orphanhood is so fair and bright. But they were twins as well as orphans. One hour brought them into the world, and almost the same hour were they parentless. Their mother was Mrs Fergusson's daughter by a former marriage—a beautiful but fragile lady, beloved by all who knew her, and idolized by her husband. But, alas! it is written in a certain old and wondrous Hebrew Book—

"The idols he shall utterly abolish;" and in this instance the prophetic utterance was relentlessly fulfilled. In childhood she fevered and died, and the awful blow prostrated the doting husband. They were buried in the same grave, only six years before the opening of our story! The little twins—heirs to much wealth—were at once taken to their grandmother's home and heart, and so escaped the many storms and blights which so often sweep ruthlessly over the orphan's heart.

Time, that ceaseless traveller, continued as usual his measured unvarying march. Spring gave place to summer, and the squares and crescents of the New Town became gay with verdure, adorned with flowers, and surrounded by fragrance. Richness and melody, and every charming delight, came to the very doors of the dwellers in this magnificent city; and every promenade, public and private, was daily thronged. The tasteful and elegant gardens which separate Heriot Row from Queen Street were the delightful resort of Mrs Fergusson's household, and many hours of glad, golden sunshine were spent in their shady groves. But the gorgeous summer, which brought joy and happiness to thousands, was to Jessie Melville a messenger of darkness and gloom; for amid its most effulgent brightness did she light the pile of her sacrificial altar, and voluntarily consume, in its fiery glow, the highest and fairest hopes of her youth. Let us gather up our spirits, and look with awe and admiration on the sublime spectacle.

on the verge of the smooth garden walks. The children were amusing themselves at a little distance, and poor Grace was absorbed by her own sad reflections, so that the silence which both had for some time maintained was unnoticed by either.

At length rousing herself, Jessie sought to divert her companion from the painful reverie into which she was plunged, and at the same time to cheer and refresh her own spirits, by pointing out the beauty of the scene by which they were environed.

"How grandly the sun glints through the foliage, and overspreads the grass with a delightful network of brightness and shadow! It is hard to realize the fact that we are at this moment in the centre of a large city—that beyond the railings of these gardens there stretch in every direction huge piles of masonry, tenanted by thousands of human beings, and covering the cares, the duties, the pleasures, the business, and the sorrows of life."

"Yes," answered Grace, emerging with a sigh from her abstraction, "Edinburgh is in many respects a singular city. It has features and advantages which no city of its size possesses. We have town and country blended together in a manner which we would look for in vain elsewhere. Yet I do not think the grass is so green, or the trees so fresh, here as in the country. When I look on this scene, lovely as it is, I feel that it has not the free, pure beauty of the woods and fields. Nature seems in a prison here, and all her showings have a restrained and unnatural appearance in my eyes. The very sunshine is dim and hazy—the birds that sometimes hop and chirp among the branches appear to be from home, and their notes are restrained—the wind, rustling among the leaves, sighs not with its ac-

customed fulness, and never sounds in that majestic way in which it utters its voice in the forest. These gardens may do very well for town's-people, but to me they are a poor substitute for the grandeur and glory of the open country."

"And yet, you seek not the country you love so much," said Jessie, with a quiet smile. "Here you are passing the bright hours of this glorious summer among the smoke and bustle of Auld Reekie, instead of spending them in the old woods and green fields you speak of."

A deeper sadness cast its shadow over Grace's pale countenance as she listened to Jessie's words, and for a few moments she made no reply. At length she murmured in a low voice, while she leaned her head on the other's shoulder,

"There are times, dear Jessie, in one's life, when all outward things fail to interest, moods when the brightest and richest objects seem dull and gloomy, days when we are forced to say that we have no pleasure in them, when our hearts are in shadow, and we wander in the thick darkness, cheered by nothing, charmed by nothing, tortured and agonized by all things. Such an experience, alas! is mine at the present time."

"Dear Miss Fergusson," said Jessie, putting her arms affectionately round Grace, "I have long seen that some secret grief is weighing down your heart. Will you not confide in me? Sorrow is sometimes lessened by sympathy. It is a relief to open our hearts to the soothing of friendship. Will you not, then, tell me the cause of your distress, and let me share it with you, or endeavour to relieve it?"

"O no, no," answered the weeping Grace. "You would despise me, you would call me weak, silly, unwomanly. Great as is my trouble, I must for ever conceal its cause."

"Nay, do not fear that I would refuse my warmest sympathy, whatever may be the source of your grief. The sorrow of a heart like yours can never call forth chiding or reproach, least of all from me. Believe me, I will respect your secret, and if in my power, aid you in your difficulty."

"O Jessie, you have been kind to me. Your friendship and attention have been my only solace since you came to reside with us. I cannot afford to lose your esteem. Pray do not—do not urge me further. And amid uncontrollable sobs, the poor blighted girl hid her face in her companion's bosom. That companion was little less agitated than herself; but she resolved now to arrive at absolute certainty. Waiting till Grace was a little more calm, she said, very tenderly,

"Do not be angry, dear Grace, but I think I know the cause of your grief.

Grace lifted up her head and looked wildly in Jessie's face.

"Nay, do not be alarmed. Your secret is in safe keeping," said the latter, as her companion gazed anxiously upon her.

"But you do not, cannot know it," faltered Grace, fearfully amazed. "I have guarded it too well for any one to suspect it."

"Nevertheless, I discovered it. *You love William Ainslie!*"

The stare of astonishment with which Grace listened to these words, may not be described, but it quickly gave place to a crimson blush. Her cheeks, neck, and bosom, glowed as with fire, and without uttering a word, she again hid her face in Jessie's arms.

This silence and confusion were sufficient confirmation.

Jessie needed no further proof that the hour of her self-denying work had come. But she shrank not, faltered not. As the poor stricken one lay sobbing on her bosom, she twined her arms round her in a tender embrace, and felt at the moment even glad that she had it in her power to heal her bruised spirit. Looking upward to the clear heaven above, she vowed to devote herself to the helpless being that clung to her in an agony of shame and weakness. She could not feel angry with Grace for loving William—nay, she admired her more for her yearning affection towards him. It was but another tribute to the worth and goodness of his character. The unreserved, undivided love of a girl so pure and maidenly, was in itself a proof of his value; and how could Jessie condemn a passion which exalted him whom she so ardently worshipped? Yes, strange as it may seem, she felt her heart drawn towards Grace, on account of that very circumstance which was to cost her so dear.

“O, Jessie, do not spurn me, do not forsake me in my misery,” murmured Grace, pathetically, as she pressed her head against Jessie’s beating heart. “Say, O say, that you will not leave me; that you will not turn away with scorn and contempt. Your kindness has been all my comfort for months past, and if I lose it now, my wretchedness will be more than I can bear.”

“I will never leave thee nor forsake thee,” whispered Jessie, fervently, all unconscious that she used the terms of the Divine promise. “It was indeed to assist and relieve you that I sought your confidence; and do not suppose that for one moment I would think meanly of you for yielding up your heart to—to your cousin. From all that I know of him, he is worthy of your highest regard.”

Jessie here stopped, for she felt her voice begin to falter,

and she feared to betray herself. Grace drank in her words with joyful avidity. The poor creature had loathed herself for giving her cousin her love unsought. She felt all the impropriety of the passion she indulged, and strove against it long and earnestly, but without avail; and when she saw that it was apparently hopeless, that William regarded her with naught but brotherly feelings, her misery became so great that her health was impaired and her mind almost shattered. No wonder, then, that Jessie's words were like balm to her wounded soul. The bruised but not yet broken reed felt a supporting hand gathering itself around it, and O, how it blessed the hand thus stretched out to uphold! Grace uttered no words in reply to Jessie's assurance of succour and consolation, but raising herself slowly up, she flung her arms round her neck, and showered kisses on her lips like rain.

And thus they sat for some time, these two pure spirits, linked together by ties which none can fully know—thus they sat, the comforter and the comforted, while around them rushed on the business and the pleasures of a large city, and above them smiled the blue summer sky, and, perchance, troops of admiring angels, attracted to the spot by such a lovely, heavenly spectacle. Earth might know nothing and care nothing about the sublime heroism and self-denial displayed at that moment on its surface, but Heaven was not heedless or regardless of it. May we not suppose that He, a part of whose earthly mission was to bind up the broken-hearted, looked kindly and benignantly from on high on the sight, seeing even in this of the travail of His soul, and being satisfied? It was a precious moment for the two girls. One felt with unspeakable joy the warm reviving breath of sympathy, the other was receiving

strength and courage for her heavy trial. Again are we constrained to feel the truth and force of the immortal dramatist's words, "Mercy is twice blest. It blesses *her* that gives and *her* that takes."

"But *how* did you discover my secret?" asked Grace, at length, through her tears. "I thought it hid from every eye."

"Ah, the watchful eye of friendship sees much," answered Jessie, evasively. "I saw from the first that you laboured under some mental distress, and connecting that with your starts and emotions when William's—I mean Mr Ainslie's—name was mentioned, I strongly suspected the truth, and thinking that I might be able in some measure to soothe or relieve you, I earnestly desired you to open your heart to me. You do not feel angry with me, do you?"

"Angry! Oh no, no. I have rather cause to bless you, for the joy I have this hour experienced. My long pent-up grief was adding tenfold to my misery. The care and jealousy with which I strove to confine it to my own bosom added to its agonizing power. The sense of loneliness and isolation made my anguish doubly dreadful; but now that another knows it and feels for me, though it cannot be removed, yet it is, O yes, it is lessened."

"But my dear Miss Fergusson——"

"Call me Grace; I like it better from you; for are you not my sister?"

"Well, dear Grace, my dear, dear sister, are you sure that your passion is, after all, a hopeless one? Though Wil—Mr Ainslie has not yet avowed an affection for you beyond that of a brother, it is not impossible that you may have inspired him with such an affection, and that he only waits a fitting opportunity to disclose it."

"Alas! no; William has ever been kind and frank to me. Had he felt the attachment to which you refer, I am sure he would have avowed it."

"Perhaps not," suggested Jessie, striving, if possible, to infuse hope into Grace's mind. "You know I was somewhat acquainted with him before I came to reside with you, and I have heard him speak of you in a strain of high admiration."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Grace, while her eye sparkled, and her bosom throbbed wildly.

"Yes, indeed, my little flutterer," resumed Jessie, with an effort at playfulness, though it required all her strength of mind to sustain the part she assumed. "But I must not tell you all the fine things he said. It would make you vain. Suffice it for you to know that the manner in which he spoke does not make an early declaration at all unlikely. So cheer up, my dear sister, the fainting heart may yet find its love reciprocated."

"And you are not deceiving me?" said Grace, looking long and earnestly into the eyes of her friend. "No, no, there is truth and sincerity in those orbs, brimful of tenderness. Yet I dare not hope. To hope now and be finally disappointed would kill me. But come, let us go in; the air is getting chill. Heaven bless you, my dearest Jessie, for the comfort you have given me."

Calling the children from their play, the party left the gardens; and, as soon as possible, Jessie sought her room, to think and act, for she felt that now she must go forward in her thorny path.

On approaching the table in her little room, Jessie found a letter which had been delivered by the postman in the afternoon. It was from William, and with trembling hands

she broke the seal. She had received letters from him regularly since he left the town—warm, affection-breathing letters—in which his highly cultivated mind poured itself out in glowing description and poetic eloquence. If love-letters, to be genuine, must be the silly things which generally go under the name, then we are afraid the effusions of our hero to his betrothed would be anything but models of the species of composition. There was nothing in them of that bombast and extravagant sentimentality which are considered to be the essence of lovers' correspondence. In every line, indeed, there beamed a tenderness and pure devotion, but the style never lost its dignity. It joined chasteness with fervour, substantiality with fluency, honesty with assertion, and genuineness with profession. Human duty in its high aspects, human pleasure in its thousand legitimate phases, human life in its dread reality, its solemn meaning, its divine purpose, and momentous consequences, were the themes of his discourse; and to a mind like Jessie's such a style of correspondence was both pleasant and profitable. She did her best to maintain it on her side, though letter-writing was not her *forte*. She had never been accustomed to it, and had, moreover, no natural aptness for it. Besides, she was necessitated to write under restraint. Having ever before her eyes the possibility, nay, great probability of the termination of their intimacy at no distant period, she could not give way to much strong feeling. Her letters were, therefore, very different from herself, as William found her in their walks, and the change was to him both unpleasant and unaccountable.

She broke the seal, and read—

"Dear Jessie,—I will be in town to-morrow night. Meet me at the Dean Bridge at half-past eight, if possible, as I

do not intend to show myself at Heriot Row till the following morning.—Ever yours, most affectionately, W. A.”

How thick and fast did the waves break upon poor Jessie's soul! In a few hours she must meet him—in a few hours part from him for ever. True, she had made up her mind to relinquish him; but this was a sudden, sudden wrenching of the ties that bound them. Yet, perhaps, 'twas better to have the consummation thus hurried upon her. If it gave little time for preparation and reflection, it afforded as little time for regret or irresolution. Yes, let it be done now, since done it must be.

She sunk into a seat in a tumult of hurried thoughts. Her reason refused to act, her mental powers were thrown into one wild chaos, and the spirit of gloomy desolation brooded over the face of the troubled waters. Starting up and walking to the far end of the room, she exclaimed, vehemently—

“What a poor, silly being I am, thus to give way to a paralyzing emotion, when the time for action has come! Let me, with an overpowering effort, banish this overcoming sensation. Let me suppress feeling, and call up reason to my aid. Gods knows I shall have time enough afterwards for grief. At present, I must think—think—think. Two hours, only two hours, to prepare!”

She sat down again, but no more weakness was displayed. Silently she sat, her head leaning on her hand, and her fair countenance expressive of intense thought. Seven o'clock struck, and still she moved not. Minute followed minute, in silent succession, and the hour of eight sounded from the hall below. This roused her. She seemed now in a state of calm resolution, very pale and grave, but entirely free from the nervousness which she formerly manifested. Hav-

ing never put aside her garden attire, she had nothing to add to her dress but a shawl to protect her from the evening air. This she quickly wrapped around her, and was about to quit the room, but on the threshold she paused, and turned back. Approaching the bell-pull, she drew it gently, and a servant appeared.

"Maggie, you will be kind enough to tell Mrs Fergusson that I have to go out on business, and may not be back till late."

"Yes, Miss Jessie. But, guid sake, are ye weel enough? Ye look awfu' queer like. Ye'r maist as pale as Miss Grace hersel."

"Do you think so?" said Jessie, forcing a smile.

"Think sae !" echoed Maggie, "I'm sure something ails ye. Better no gang oot till ye'r better. And the kind-hearted girl looked anxiously in the face of the young governess, for she was a favourite with all the servants. .

"Indeed, you are mistaken, Maggie, I am not unwell; and do not say to Mrs Fergusson or Miss Grace that you thought so. It may pain them unnecessarily, you know."

"Weel, Miss Jessie, I'll no say a word; but I ken fine ye'r no richt, and the morn ye'll either be better or waur."

Saying which, Maggie followed Jessie down stairs—the one returning to the kitchen, and the other passing out into the street.

"*Better or waur!*" murmured Jessie to herself, as she went along the street, "*Better or waur!*"


CHAPTER X.

THE PARTING.

MANY persons were strolling along the Dean Bridge when Jessie reached it. Artisans, shopkeepers, and clerks, who had been confined all day, had come out to inhale the fresh air and enjoy the beauty of the glorious summer evening. The sun was setting behind the Corstorphine woods—setting in a halo of golden grandeur—and, in the distant east, the pale moon waited to see him depart, and to enter on her triumph as queen of the night. For once the thickness which o'erhangs the sea had dispersed, and the deep, blue water reflected the clear, blue sky above. The last rays of the sun lingered on the Lighthouse of Inchkeith, and showed dimly on the far-off Fife Hills. Here and there a sail was visible on the ocean, and the last steamer was plying its way between Burntisland and Granton. In the distance might be heard the wild, prolonged scream of the railway whistle, but, with this exception, a universal silence reigned around.

“Solemn and silent everywhere,
Nature with folded hands stood there,
Breathing out her evening prayer.”

Much of this beauty and glory Jessie marked not. Her own sad thoughts and terrible anticipations excluded outward influences. She looked in all directions, but failed



to detect among the passers-by the tall, manly form of Ainslie. It was, in truth, scarcely the hour he had appointed.

She had walked twice along the bridge, and was standing looking unconsciously over the parapet on the fearful depth below, when some one touched her on the arm. Turning round, she encountered the good-humoured, laughing face of Richard Sandilands.

"Jessie Melville, hoo's a' wi' ye? A sicht o' you is guid for sair een."

"O Richard, how are you? How is my friend Mary? I wonder you have not her with you in such a fine night as this."

"Your friend Mary is no far away," said Mary Richardson, stepping forth, laughing and blushing, from behind Richard. The two girls shook each other's hand most cordially. They had not met since Jessie left Chambers's, though Mary knew of Jessie's improved condition and prospects, as regarded her position in Mrs Fergusson's household.

"But what are ye daeing here? Hae ye been walkin, or are ye guanna walk?" said Richard.

"I have come to meet some one," returned Jessie, quietly.

"O ho, yon gentleman wi' the plaid, nae doot," said Richard, slyly. "But he'll no hae the plaid the nicht. It's owre warm, unless he's gotten a muslin ane."

Mary, more penetrating than her "chap," noticed that his words annoyed Jessie; she hastened, therefore, to change the subject.

"And hoo dae ye like to live in yon grand hoose in Heriot Row? Dae ye never wuss ye were back to the fauldin-shop again?"

"Well, I can't say that I have a particular desire to ply the folder there again, unless to be among my old friends for an hour or two. Perhaps I may look in on you some afternoon. Do they ever speak about me?"

"Aye, mony and mony a time," answered Mary. "We a' missed ye rael sair when ye went away, and nane mair than mysel, though I canna say I was very vexed either, for Richard there had a notion o' ye, I thought, and I was feared ye wad tak him frae me."

"Richard had more sense than leave you for me," rejoined Jessie, laughing; "but when am I to be invited to the wedding?"

"O, it will no be lang, I expect," said Richard, bluntly—"at least no if I get my wull, I wanted Mary to set the day lang syne, but she said it was owre warm weather to——"

"Wheisht, ye callant," interrupted the blushing Mary, putting her hand on his mouth. "Dinna stand there tellin' lees."

"But really, Mary," persisted Jessie, "you must not be long in letting us all have an opportunity of wishing you joy."

"Dae ye hear that?" said Richard to his intended.

"Atweel I hear it," was the reply; "but I want your whiskers to grow first."

"O, for shame," said Jessie, as Richard reddened at this allusion to his beardless face; but, daunted only for a moment, he quickly rejoined—

"My whiskers might hae been thick eneugh, if ye hadna been sae desperate ill to kiss. But I had aye sic a warsalin' to get at yer mouth, that they hae been fairly rubbit aff."

"There, the tables are turned on you now, Mary, and you

richly deserve it." Poor Mary had nothing for it but to run off.

"Guid nicht, Jessie," she exclaimed, looking over her shoulder. "Dinna be lang in ca'in' at the shop, and I'll tell ye a' about it."

And the happy pair hurried away, leaving Jessie filled with half-envious thoughts, as she contrasted her sad lot with their happy prospects.

It was now near nine o'clock, and William had not made his appearance. What could have detained him? Could she have mistaken the place of meeting, the night, or the hour, or had any accident befallen him? Her heart gave a wild bound, for at the far end of the Bridge she perceived him advancing with haste. Curiously enough, no one but themselves were on the Bridge at the moment; she had, therefore, a full view of him as he drew near. How glorious he appeared in her eyes, as, having caught sight of her, he bounded on! His handsome face, now rosy and red with country air and exercise, was lighted up with happiness, a smile rested on his mouth, and danced in his eyes. Looking round and seeing that no one was in sight, he fairly began to run, and in another moment had caught her in his arms.

"My own Jessie," he whispered, "have I seen you once again? How I have longed for this hour! But you are silent—you tremble. Great heaven, she has fainted!"

It was too true. The recollection of her sacrifice rushing upon the joy of the meeting was too much for her, and when she felt Ainslie's warm kiss upon her lips, she became insensible. Greatly alarmed, he was about to look for assistance, when, with a sigh, she again opened her eyes.

"Look up, Jessie; it is your own William who holds

you," he exclaimed, while he eagerly watched her returning consciousness.

"How foolish I am," she said, gazing up in his face: "I meant to be very strong at our meeting to-night, but here I am weakness itself. But it is gone now, and Jessie is herself again. There, you may release me; I can stand alone now."

"My poor girl, I did not think you would have been so overcome; you used to have more——"

"More strength of mind, you would say," added she, seeing him hesitate. "But of late I have had much to undergo, and do not feel so brave as I could wish."

"What! in trouble, and not acquaint me with it? This is unkind."

"Nay, do not chide me," she said, sadly? "When you know all you will forgive me."

"Know all! For mercy's sake tell me what has occurred. Has any one annoyed or insulted you? Has my father——"

"No, no; do not look so fiercely or talk so wildly; but let us seek a more secluded spot, for what we have this night to talk about requires privacy. Is there no private or retired road near this?"

"Yes, beyond the Hospitals there is a road little frequented, leading to the foot of the hill near Craig Crook. Let us go by the Distillery, and we shall reach it in a few minutes."

"You must have suddenly resolved to come to town," said Jessie, as they walked silently along. "I got your note only three hours ago."

"It was indeed a sudden resolution," he replied. "But, of late, your letters have been strangely unsatisfactory; so

cold and restrained, that I feared I was losing your affection. For weeks I have been restless on this account, and yesterday morning I determined to set forth and visit you."

"It was an idle, a groundless fear, William. I hesitate not, at this trying moment, to say that I love you with all the affection of which my nature is capable—that you are the only one I ever shall love."

"Blessings on you, my dearest Jessie, for this generous assurance. But why the coldness of your letters? They are so unlike yourself?"

"This will be explained presently. We are now alone. William, you have often talked to me and written to me about the nobleness and grandeur of self-sacrifice, the greatness of foregoing our own pleasure and enjoyment for the sake of others. Are you prepared to practise what we have often thought so rapturously on in theory?"

"What mean you, Jessie?"

"I mean this—and O, William, prepare yourself for my words. When I utter them you will easily see that I must have undergone much suffering ere the meaning of them could take possession of my mind. William, you and I are walking together for the last time. We must part with each other to-night—for ever!"

He stopt, and looked into her face. She returned his bewildered gaze with a sad yet steady look.

"Jessie," he at length said, slowly, almost sternly, "I did not think you would resort to this cruel sport. It is unworthy of you to try to alarm me by such an idle and impossible, yet excruciating idea. There are women, I know, who give way to such heartless methods of teasing, but I could not for a moment have expected you to descend to such ignominious arts."

"Hush, William, hush! you will, ere we part, be very sorry for uttering such words as these. But I forgive you. It is hard, I know, for you to realize what I said, as *truth*; but when you find it really so, you will regret your unkind language."

He looked at her again, more keenly and intently than before, and saw that she was indeed in earnest. "For pity's sake, tell me what you mean," he gasped; "have you for one instant contemplated the possibility of our separation?"

"Alas! yes. Fate has so decreed it, or rather, Providence, who cannot err, demands such a sacrifice from us—but wait a moment, till I tell you the cause of this painful necessity. You remember that night you saw me in the theatre; you noticed my troubled look, and sought, on the day of your departure, to know the reason of it."

"I remember it perfectly—go on."

"Long before you came into the box, I had noticed the party it contained: above all, I was struck with the appearance of—of your cousin. She seemed so pensive and so sad: I, of course, knew not who she was; but I saw she suffered greatly, and felt strong pity for her untold grief. By the conversation of a couple in the seat behind me, I learned that she was Miss Fergusson. One of the speakers was Maggie Johnstone, whom you doubtless know as a servant in your aunt's family; and she told her companion that she suspected the cause of Miss Grace's trouble was secret love for her cousin, Mr Ainslie."

"Love for me!" exclaimed William, starting as if he had received a blow.

"You may imagine my feelings on learning this: I had scarcely any doubt that the surmise of the servant was

true. It accounted to me perfectly for the distress, nay, the despair, I had previously noticed. By-and-by you came in, and from some small things I then observed, my suspicion was strengthened. What, then, was I to do? From your description of Miss Fergusson, I feared she would not be able to bear the dreadful weight of her unrequited love. Your words rang in my ears—'Grace has not your strength of mind,' you said. The path of duty, at that moment, opened itself up before me. It was rugged, O William, terribly rugged and thorny. Its first appearance was appalling; but a finger-post was at its entrance, and on the finger-post a hand, that silently, yet sternly pointed me onward. *I resolved to obey.* To-night, then, William, our paths separate, and I must go my weary way alone!"

"My dear Jessie, did I not love you so devotedly, I would chide you severely for such romantic ideas as you have been cherishing. It was really foolish, if not worse, to contemplate such a terrible possibility as this, because of the sad looks of a young lady, and the idle prating of a silly servant-girl. It is quite possible, nay, probable in the highest degree, that you are entirely mistaken as to the cause of Grace's trouble. How terrible is it, then, to torture both yourself and me so wantonly. You should surely have had better and surer ground to go upon; and even if, in the end, your suspicion had been proved correct, in what way are you called upon to sacrifice both of us to gratify her foolish passion?"

"Gently, dear William," replied Jessie, meekly. I can easily understand how the sudden presentation of this duty shocks you. I can, therefore, freely forgive your hasty injustice. But know that before I even allowed myself to contemplate it fixedly, I resolved to know the truth—to

have suspicion resolved into certainty. It was to reach this knowledge that I asked you to have me placed in Mrs Ferguson's household. From the hour I entered it I studied your cousin's condition, and every day's observation tended further to the confirmation of my thoughts. Yet the sacrifice was of too tremendous a nature to be based on anything less than absolute knowledge. This knowledge I have gained to-day. This very afternoon your cousin confessed to me that it was a passion for you, which she apprehended was unreturned, that was the cause of her grief."

"Merciful heaven! And my cousin really loves me? What an unfortunate business!"

"Unfortunate it no doubt is, but there can be no mistake as to what is required of us," said Jessie, firmly.

"Required of us!" echoed William. Why, Grace must learn to cure herself of this foolish regard for me. She must——"

"Stop, William," interrupted Jessie. "This is impossible. It would kill her."

"Nonsense," exclaimed William.

"It is truth," said Jessie, solemnly. "For months she has pined away daily, and at this moment is reduced to the most excessive weakness. Were she not to be assured of something favourable soon, I know she would die."

"Well, but Jessie, how can we avert this?"

"William, you must marry her! Nay, start not thus angrily. The duty may be a hard one, nevertheless, it is very plain."

"How very coolly you talk of this tremendous sacrifice! You love me as strongly as ever, you say, and I believe it, for you are truth itself; yet you speak of our separation as

deliberately and calmly as if your heart was scarcely interested in the matter at all.

“Ah! have I not stood face to face with the gloomy alternative for months? It has been a hard, a very hard matter indeed to school myself to the fearful, agonizing contemplation; but by steadily gazing, I have learned to speak thus calmly of it. Think me not callous nor indifferent. O, do not, I beseech you, think thus harshly of me, for your unkind thoughts would render what I can now scarcely bear altogether overwhelming.”

“Forgive me, dearest, for paining you by my words,” said William, fondly. “You are the same noble, generous being I have ever found you. But dismiss from your mind, I beseech you, all thoughts of our separation; for this must never, never be—an attachment like ours cannot be snapt asunder like a broken reed.”

“William,” said Jessie, in a solemn tone, and with an earnestness and an eloquence which we cannot possibly convey in words, “you are losing sight of your own noble character. You are, in the hurry of the moment, blinding your better judgment, and forsaking your high principles. How often, in our walks together, and in your letters, have you talked loftily and gloriously of human life and human duty; how vividly have you painted the greatness, the divine beauty of self-sacrifice, and bitterly bewailed the rareness of its exhibition in our world! Never for a moment did I think that you would thus tread in the path of thousands, and prove traitor alike to yourself and humanity; you who are the very embodiment of generous feeling, pure emotion, and brotherly love. For my sake, William, for your own sake, for God’s sake, return to reason and yourself. Gather up the forces of your great nature, and tread

with conquering steps o'er the mountain of sacrifice. Accept bravely the gage which destiny throws down before you, and walk at last like a hero over the mighty battle-field. Were it possible basely to yield to the temptation that besets us, would not remorse and misery haunt us all our lives through? How could we possibly enjoy a moment's happiness, knowing that it rested on the living misery or premature death of another? Would not this thought poison our cup of existence, and rob us for ever of self-respect, satisfaction, and repose? Better, a thousand times better, to bear the pain of a temporary separation, than entail upon ourselves regret and eternal remorse. Were we to go forward according to our former resolution, we would find a shadow resting on the marriage altar, our home would never be lighted up with the sunshine of domestic bliss, because of the dark cloud that would for ever overshadow it; our expected happiness would be found a dream, life would be embittered, and even the great eternity beyond would become to us one wide limitless region for perpetual self-accusation. But follow the path of duty, and how abundant is our reward! Let us cheerfully make this self-sacrifice, and though for a time we must exist asunder, yet the consciousness of our triumph over temptation, will ever support us—in every experience of life it will sustain us—in the hour of death it will soothe and bear us up; and when this scene, with its forms and its trials, shall have vanished away, we shall meet each other on the shores of the better land—that land where there is no marrying nor giving in marriage, but where love is immortal, and companionship eternal."

She paused, for heavy sobs were bursting from her listener's heart. The short "eclipse of faith" had passed away while

she spoke, and now the cloud was departing in rain. He wept, yes, that manly heart wept, but it was in tears of joy—joy that it had been rescued from the path of selfish indulgence into which he would have gone—joy, that he had been recalled to reason and duty. “Noble, noble girl,” he exclaimed, clasping her in a passionate embrace, “what a treasure thou art, what a guiding star, for poor, erring, sinning humanity ! There is hope yet for our fallen world when such as thou art to be found in it.”

Jessie was now weeping too, glad and happy because William was restored to his noble character. It would have been strange, indeed, had the sudden revelation not been received with some such tokens of rebellion as he had manifested ; but she could not bear to see him whom she had almost adored, because of his exalted nature, wrestling disadvantageously with temptation, and cherishing cowardly feelings. She had every confidence that he would soon prevail, and cast the unworthy thoughts under his feet, but she was in agony until the battle was over, and the victory won. Then when the enemy was vanquished, and his tears and words proclaimed the blessed issue, she laid her head on his breast, and they wept together. Many are the sights, O moon, that thou hast witnessed in thy lonely night-watchings, but scarcely hast thou ever looked upon a fairer than this—these two young souls, bracing themselves under thy soft, sweet light for such a course of high self-denial—such a bold, beautiful, and brave adherence to right.

“For one thing I must stipulate in this matter,” said William, after they had become more calm. “It is that my mother be informed of it all. She knows of our attachment, and it would be unjust to all of us were she to remain in ignorance of the cause of our separation. For me to

marry my cousin without a word of explanation to her would be to subject myself to her most unmitigated scorn and contempt. You will, therefore, I hope, readily consent to this step?"

Jessie's consent to this proposition was cheerfully, nay, gratefully given. For reasons which the reader can understand, she wished to retain the good opinion and affection of Lady Ainslie. Besides, it could not do any harm to let her into their confidence. She was too judicious to make any use of her knowledge, would never divulge the secret either to Grace or any other, and might afford consolation and comfort to both in the terrible emergency.

And now they were walking slowly toward, making the most of their last, sad interview. Now that the sacrifice was resolved upon, and about to be made, the old tender thoughts came back to their hearts, and in the hour of separation they clung to each other with a lingering fondness. It was very late when they came along Heriot Row, on the side next the gardens, and Jessie would have gone in immediately, but he entreated her to take another turn, and she could not deny him.

"To-night should have been like the first night of our meeting, Jessie," he murmured, as they slowly sauntered to and fro; "a night of storm and tempest. That serene moon, and those powerful stars, seem all a mockery. Darkness and hurricane would have been more befitting accompaniments of our separation."

"Nay, William," was the reply. "It seems to me as if heaven was smiling on our resolution. A scene like this is a merciful salve for our wounded spirits. But, hark! twelve o'clock is striking. O, what will Mrs Fergusson say if she knows I am out till this hour? William, the

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human prostration. The sight was more than she could bear, and sinking down on the floor, she hid her face in the curtains, while her choking sobs echoed sadly in the silent room.

When she looked up again, he was gone.

CHAPTER XI.

GRACE MADE HAPPY.

"PLEASE, Miss Melville, grandma sent us to ask a holiday to-day," exclaimed Jessie's two little pupils, as they ran into the school-room on the following morning, their faces radiant with delight and joyful anticipation.

"A holiday?" said their governess, with a sweet smile.

"Yes," said Ellen. "Cousin Ainslie is coming to-day, and we are so glad, for we have always nice fun when he is here. Now do, Miss Melville, let us have a holiday," pleaded the young creature, climbing into Jessie's lap to give her a kiss.

Jessie was fain to get her into her arms, to hide her emotion. "Do you like cousin Ainslie very much?" she whispered in Ellen's ear.

"O yes, very, very much," was the earnest reply. "Everybody likes him. You will like him too when you see him. Shall I bring him to the school-room whenever he comes?"

"You forget, my dear, that I know Mr Ainslie already."

"And don't you *like* him?" asked the little girl, looking interrogatingly in her face. Poor Jessie could hardly bear the inquisitive look even of the child; but she replied, with the utmost composure she could assume—

"Yes, I like him very much; and you shall have the holiday you wish."

"O, thank you, thank you," cried her sister. "Now Ellen, let us go and tell grandma." And they were both hurrying off, when Ellen recollected that grandma had bid her bring Miss Melville down to breakfast.

Jessie was hardly yet prepared to meet the family, and she thought at first of pleading a headache as an excuse for absence; but her better angel came to her rescue, and the coward-thought fled. "No," she mentally exclaimed, "let me not stoop to the meanness, not to say the sin, of a falsehood, in order to evade any of the weight of my sacrifice. After what I underwent last night, I need not shrink from the lesser parts of the trial. The most bitter part of it is over, and I must now familiarize myself with the endurance of the remaining portions. Thank Heaven, the dregs of this terrible cup were drunk first."

"O, grandma, we have got the holiday," exclaimed the children, as, along with Jessie, they entered the breakfast parlour.

"Good morning, Miss Melville," said Mrs Fergusson, gaily. "You find us all in a happy mood to-day; your friend Mr Ainslie is to be here this forenoon, according to a note I had from him last night; and he is such a favourite with the whole of us, that the news of his visit has thrown us into an excitement of gladness."

Jessie glanced at Grace, who sat near the window, pulling to pieces a beautiful red rose, scarcely redder, however, than the bright bloom upon her own cheeks. The paleness which had long lingered on her face was gone; her eye, usually so languid and dull, was bright and sparkling; her whole appearance was changed; listlessness had given place to anima-





**"Ellen ran into the lobby, followed by her sister, and they immediately returned, dragging Ainslie into the room."—
Page 129.**

tion—the aspect of despair was turned into the sprightly elasticity of hope. An alteration so marked and so sudden struck her mother with wonder and surprise; and for the first time the true cause of her daughter's peculiar illness dawned upon her mind. "She loves William—no doubt of it," mused Mrs Fergusson. "Poor thing, can she have cause to think that her affection is not returned? And yet William has been always fond of her. Pooh, pooh! he will be sure to open his mind to her soon; and then we shall all have a laugh at her foolish fears. Perhaps he intends to propose to day. Well, the opportunity shall not be wanting at any rate."

Breakfast was hardly over when the door-bell rang violently. "Surely that can't be William?" exclaimed Mrs Fergusson; "it is not like his ring."

"O, yes it is," cried Ellen, who ran into the lobby, followed by her sister, and they immediately returned, dragging Ainslie into the room.

Jessie's heart beat wildly; and, in spite of her efforts to be calm, she felt herself trembling in every limb. At this moment, however, she caught sight of Grace rising eagerly to meet her cousin, and this called back her self-command. Cordial were the greetings with which the young man was on all hands met. The children climbed up to his arms, and hung there with rapturous glee. Mrs Fergusson embraced him with all a mother's fondness, and Grace welcomed him with her sweetest smile.

Now came Jessie's turn. "Here is your friend, Miss Melville, William," said Mrs Fergusson, turning to her; "I am sure I can never thank you enough for bringing her to us. She has been nothing less than a blessing to the household."

William advanced, and held out his hand: Jessie, too,

held out hers; but they avoided looking at each other. He managed to mutter a few words which needed no reply, and then passed to a seat at the other side of the room, where he was soon engaged in answering Mrs Fergusson's questions about Broomfield Park, and the improvements that had been going on there.

By degrees, Jessie ventured to turn her eyes towards him, and was shocked to see how wretchedly he looked. On his face were traces of deep and recent suffering—traces amounting almost to haggardness. Yet she was glad to see that he had perfect command of himself. If he had suffered, he had conquered; for a sad composure, a calm, solemn collectedness reposed on his features. Ah, yes, he had been in agony, and prevailed. We may not tell the terrible battling of his soul with itself and its dearest cherishings through all the previous night, as he wandered to and fro on the silent, deserted top of the Calton Hill. For hours he had paced its monumental summit, till Jessie's sublime figure was literally realized. After a long, tumultuous contest, he at length trod "with conquering steps o'er the mountain of sacrifice" The sun was just rising when the battle was finished and the victory won. Far away to the east, he sprang from his ocean-bed, and lighted up the broad German Ocean with a track of glory. "Welcome, welcome, bright king of day!" exclaimed the glorious youth, as he bared his head to the morning breeze, and gazed on the broad disc of the appearing luminary. "Thou art an emblem of all that is noble, majestic, and heroic. Let me, like thee, pursue my way with a never-ceasing progression—steadily, unflinchingly, untiringly—and when my course is run, if, like thee, I set in glory and splendour behind the eternal mountains, what matters it though clouds and

darkness may for a time gather around me? The present, with its joys and sorrows, shall soon be swallowed up in the mighty future; and hath not my Divine Master said, 'It is through much tribulation that ye shall enter the kingdom?' Away, then, with all further repining or rebellious feelings. Let me follow, though afar off, the noble example of my betrothed, and proceed without another murmur to the altar of sacrifice."

Fortified with this heroic resolution, he left the hill, and sought a few hours repose at Gibb's Hotel, in Prince's Street. After breakfast he proceeded to Heriot Row, to consummate the voluntary self-immolation, where we have just seen the reception he was met with.

"You must have left Broomfield Park very early this morning," said Mrs Fergusson, during a pause in the conversation.

"I arrived in town last night," replied William, quietly.

"Last night!" exclaimed the other. "And why did you not come straight here? Why, at all events, did you not pass the night with us?"

William paused, and Jessie looked fearfully towards him. He rallied, however, immediately.

"I had a little important business to transact," he said, in a low voice, "and was kept late, so I could not think of disturbing you."

"O, pshaw! when did you learn to observe such ceremony with us? How often have you come in at late, or even *early* hours? O, Miss Melville, he wants you to think he has been a very model of a young man, but don't believe it. He did not, I assure you, use to be so very modest or bashful."

"Now, aunt, don't let me suffer *unjustly* in Miss Mel-

ville's opinion," said William, gravely. I have many faults, doubtless, but I don't think I was the night-raker which your words imply. I must appeal to Grace for the vindication of my character."

"Indeed, mother, you know you are wronging my cousin," said the individual thus appealed to with a blush.

"O yes, I dare say," returned Mrs Fergusson, with affected displeasure. "You are sure to take his part, as you always did, when he got into a fault." And so saying, she left the room with a pretended air of offended dignity, but, in reality, to superintend the preparation of dinner.

After her departure, an awkward silence prevailed; for the children had followed their grandma, and could no longer serve to cover the embarrassment of the young folks. At length William rose, and said—

"Grace, will you be good enough to come with me to the library, and help to seek some books I want?"

Away tripped the delighted Grace, followed by her cousin. As he was about to leave the room, he turned and looked significantly at Jessie. She perfectly understood him, and, by an approving gesture, motioned him to go. One fond, silent look, they bent for a moment on each other, and he departed. She listened to his footsteps along the passage, heard him enter the library, and shut the door—then she sought the solitude of her own room, where we will not, dare not, follow her.

Some hours afterwards, she heard a tap at her door, and on opening it, Grace Fergusson rushed impetuously into her arms, in a wild delirium of joy. The cause Jessie at once divined; and as she looked upon the radiant, happy countenance of the young girl, she felt the first thrill of reward.

"O, Jessie," whispered Grace, "I could not delay in forming you of my happiness—William has asked me to become his wife."

"There, did I not tell you that your cousin admired you?" answered Jessie, with forced gaiety. "Let me," she continued, with a firm voice, "wish you much, very much joy. You must be very happy with such a husband."

"O yes, William is indeed one to be proud of. Do you know, he wishes our marriage to take place immediately?"

"Immediately?" echoed Jessie, with a start.

"Yes, he would insist upon it, and I could not refuse him."

"And wherefore should you? Happiness cannot be realized too soon."

"But, you know, all my things are to prepare."

"I will assist you."

"You! O, will you? What a kind creature you are! how I shall be indebted to you!"

Ay, Grace Fergusson, indebted to Jessie Melville you are, but how deeply you shall never know. For your sake, has she done one of the most sublime things ever performed on earth. To raise you from the "slough of despond," into which you were plunged, she yielded up all her earthly prospects—sacrificed a love, equally strong as yours, and far more elevated—relinquished birth, and the noblest manly heart that ever beat for woman. What greater thing than this can woman do? Where, in the annals of female history, is there a deed recorded that transcends it? Were we to search the record through and through, we would search in vain.

All unconscious of this, however, was Grace, as she lay folded to Jessie's throbbing heart, and told her of her bliss.

When William asked her to be his wife, it was in a kind, a very kind tone; but the ardour of a lover was in no way manifested, and unless she had been so deeply and hopelessly enamoured of him, she must have observed it; but, poor thing, the request was such a joyful one to her, that, in the intoxication of pleasure, she saw nothing, heard nothing, but the fact. Being profoundly ignorant of William's attachment to Jessie, she never for a moment doubted that she possessed his heart; and her powers of observation being rendered useless, owing to the strength of her love, the quiet, formal manner in which she was addressed passed altogether unnoticed. It was just as well that it was so. Since others had resolved to endure so much agony for her sake, it was better that she was spared the pain of knowing it. The sacrifice would have lost much of its sweet-smelling savour had the object of it known that it was offered. Yet did her ignorance cause her to inflict an additional pang on the sacrificing pair.

"I told William that I wished you to be my bridesmaid," said Grace, while her head still lay on Jessie's shoulder.

"And what did he say?" asked Jessie, falteringly.

"He seemed as if he did not wish it; but said I might ask you."

"Have you no friend who could perform this office for you?" inquired Jessie, in as firm a tone as she could command.

"O yes, many," returned Grace; "but none whom I should like so much as you."

"Let us leave this matter to Lady Ainslie," said Jessie, after a pause. "If she advises it, I shall willingly comply with your request. In the meantime, you must return to

the parlour. Your ——, Mr Ainslie will wish you beside him."

"O no," replied Grace, innocently. "He had to go away to see about some business, and will only be able to look in again before he goes."

"Does he leave town to-day?"

"So it appears. I tried hard to get him to stay till to-morrow, but without success."

Just then Mrs Fergusson was heard at the bottom of the stairs, calling upon her daughter, and off ran Grace, leaving Jessie to her own sad thoughts. She was called down some time after to bid William good-bye—to shake hands with him for the first time as a common acquaintance. "Yes, that too must be learned," she thought, "and we must use ourselves to it as we best may."

"Where is my father?" inquired William Ainslie of a servant in the hall at Broomfield Park, on the following morning.

"In his own room, sir," was the reply.

"Has he not been out this morning at all?"

"Yes, sir. He took a few turns on the lawn, but went in again about half an hour ago."

Thus informed, William took his way to his father's apartment. The baronet, as on a former occasion, was sitting in a large easy chair, and looked surprised when his son appeared before him; for since the memorable morning in Queen Street, they had held little intercourse with each other.

"I have sought an interview with you, sir," began William, "concerning a subject which was rather rudely terminated between us, some time back."

Sir William's brow became clouded, and his eye emitted

an angry flash; but suppressing further signs of wrath, he replied, coldly—

“I am glad you have at last discovered the respect due to me, though I must confess the discovery is more tardy than I looked for. I expected you to return to your senses much sooner.”

“Let us, if you please, avoid all reference to our former conversation, since it might be the cause of renewed disturbance. My present object here is to solicit your consent to my marriage with my cousin.”

“With Grace?” exclaimed his father, springing from his chair and grasping him warmly by the hand. “My dear boy, how delighted I am to hear you talk so sensibly! I knew you would soon get over the foolish passion for that low girl——”

“Stop, father, I implore you!” interrupted William sternly. “Do not run into any mistake. My love for Jessie Melville is as strong as ever—ay, if possible, more ardent, more intense; nevertheless, I intend, with your permission, to marry Grace.”

“You have it, you have it!” exclaimed the delighted baronet, who could think of nothing but the fact that his darling project was now to be realized. “Let the marriage be celebrated immediately, if you choose; and as for this girl who still holds some sway over you, I am willing to do something for her—to settle a small sum on her, for instance, or provide her with a suitable husband, when she will be out of your way——”

“Hold, sir!” thundered William, maddened by such cold-blooded propositions. “Make no further allusion to Jessie Melville, who is as far above your idea of her as heaven is above the earth. Know, however, that it is not on your

account, or in obedience to your desire, that I wed my cousin. I will be frank with you, and say, that if nothing but this had urged me to the step I am about to take, nothing would have prevented me from making Jessie my wife. The considerations which *do* influence me, allow me to doubt your ability to understand. You have, unfortunately, indulged in the contemplation of worldly ideas, till the higher thoughts of the spiritual region have become entire strangers to you; it would, therefore, be useless to enter into certain matters which have led to this change in my plan. It is due, however, both to myself and the lady to whom I was engaged, to say, that our sentiments towards each other are exactly what they were, and that the termination of our engagement implies nothing dishonourable on either side, but the opposite. Again, therefore, must I request you to forbear alluding in any way to the matter."

The baronet was puzzled, but he saw that his son was in no humour for further conversation in this direction. He felt wounded by William's words, and would fain have shown his displeasure, but was afraid to mar the now propitious aspect of affairs by another quarrel. He, therefore, repeated his willingness to have the marriage celebrated without delay.

"The Grange has been repaired this spring," he said, "and may in a few weeks be ready for your reception. Of course, Broomfield Park must be your final home when I am gone, but I should like to remain master here as long as I live."

"Certainly, sir; I should never think of any other thing: but as to where our home shall be, will depend much upon Grace. I would prefer a country life certainly; but as to

taking possession of the Grange, this is not for you or I to determine."

"Depend upon it, both Grace and her mother will be anxious for this arrangement," replied Sir William; "but, as you say, it may be made a matter for future consideration. You were in Edinburgh yesterday, I understand. Did you enter upon this subject with Grace?"

"I did. I proposed to her, and was accepted," answered William, laconically.

"That's right," said his father, rubbing his hands, as he always did when well pleased. "Then nothing now remains but to fix the wedding-day, and prepare for the happy event."

"I wish it to be as early as possible," said his son, with something very like a sigh; but observing Sir William looking at him attentively, and with apparent curiosity, he gave his countenance a firm, composed expression, and added—"Since all parties are quite willing, there is no need for unnecessary delay."

"Shall we say this day month, then, if Grace be agreeable?"

"So be it."

"Bravo!" cried Sir William, fairly beside himself with joy, and jumping about the room in a style very different from his usual consequential, aristocratic deportment. His son looked at him with pity—sad to think that such a superior mind as his should be prostrated before such an unworthy shrine.

"I must go and tell your mother the glad news," said the baronet, making for the door.

"I told her myself last night," replied Ainslie.

"You did!" Ah, you dog, why did you not tell me then,

too, when you knew how glad it would make me? Never mind, I must go and receive her congratulations." Saying which, he ran rather than walked to Lady Ainslie's dressing-room.

"This day month, then," groaned poor William, when he found himself alone—"This day month, and Jessie is lost to me for ever."

CHAPTER XII.

THE SACRIFICE COMPLETED.

GREAT were the preparations for the approaching marriage in the household at Heriot Row. The little girls had almost a vacation, for their governess was busy from morning to night, getting ready the adornments of the bride. Yes, Jessie Melville was working at the adornments for the bride of William Ainslie; and to look at her plying her unwearied hands, no one would suppose that it was other than a work and labour of love. Grace herself was able to do little or nothing. The reaction from the deepest grief to the fullest joy was threatening to be as dangerous to her weak frame as her former state of utter hopelessness. Her very gladness was eating up her strength, and unfitting her for any kind of action; she had, therefore, to rely chiefly on Jessie for the forwarding of the necessary preparations. Nor did she rely in vain. The heroic girl, seeing the inability of her friend, undertook to get things done, giving her energetic and unwearied assistance in whatever was to be performed. O, it was not all the bitterness of renunciation to renounce. Had she, the moment she parted from William Ainslie, gone away into some far solitude, where she would neither have seen nor heard of the marriage that followed, the sacrifice she made would have been grand and sublime enough, but it added tenfold to its transcendent greatness, when she actually

exerted herself to do many of the things necessary to its accomplishment. She had, indeed, set her face as a flint, and would not shrink from the aggravated torture of her unparalleled position.

One consolation, however, she had in the midst of the fiery furnace, and this lay in the kindness and attentions of Lady Ainslie, who was now staying at Heriot Row till the ceremony was over. As William had stipulated, he had informed her of the whole facts of the case, and her admiration of Jessie's conduct was unbounded. She alone knew of her self-denial, she was the only one Jessie wished to know of it; and ~~in~~ the tender affection the knowledge elicited from her Jessie felt the only alleviation of her pain which the circumstances admitted of. Many were the happy communings she thus had with her mother; and though she could not call her by the endearing name, yet, knowing that she *was* her mother, she clung to her with unspeakable fondness, and received with a fulness of joy, which none could comprehend, the caresses which she lavished upon her. By her thoughtful consideration, too, many pangs, which she would have otherwise experienced, were spared her. She would not hear of Jessie being the bridesmaid, and, indeed, wished to save her from doing any thing connected with the marriage at all; but Jessie said that such refrainings on her part might lead to suspicions, and these she would not for the world induce.

It was the afternoon before the wedding, and Jessie sat in the parlour alone, putting the last ornament to the bridal dress which had been sent home in the morning. Mrs Fergusson, Grace, and Lady Ainslie were shopping in Princes Street, and the only company she had was her own sad thoughts. On the coming day the sacrifice was to be

completed, and she was busy thinking of many things connected therewith. As her mind brooded over the subject, tears came into her eyes, and they fell drop by drop on the rich white robe that lay on her knee. The door being slightly ajar, and she being so absorbed in reflection, she knew not that some one had entered the room, and was gazing earnestly upon her. It was Ainslie. He was told by the servant that the ladies were out, and therefore expected to find no one in the parlour. He was mistaken. There sat Jessie with her back to him; but above the mantle-piece, in front of which she was seated, was hung a large mirror, and therein was she faithfully reflected—her sad face, tears, and all.

He was rooted to the spot. In spite of himself, he could not withdraw. They had never been alone since that fearful parting night; and now, when an opportunity occurred of speaking to her again, he could not forego it. But her appearance, as seen in the glass, startled and staggered him, and all his firmness forsook him. Dreaming not that she was observed by any one, least of all by him, she was letting some of the slumbering feeling get vent—some of the human weakness manifest itself. Regret was not there. O, no! not one repenting thought crossed her mind. But she would have been more—nay, less—than woman, had she not felt, and that keenly, the extent of her voluntary loss. For some time back she had been so engaged, that she had not leisure to commune with herself, except in the silent watches of the night; but this afternoon, being alone, and within a few hours of the consummation of her sacrifice, she naturally gave way to a little quiet, heart-easing crying.

This was but a sorry spectacle for her lover. Poor fellow, he had had enough to do with himself for many days back,

though, like her, he had resolved to murmur not nor complain. But coming thus unexpectedly upon her when she was off her guard, and witnessing her deep anguish, he could not restrain himself, but groaned heavily.

She started at the sound, and lifted up her head. She saw William's form in the glass, and, uttering a cry of delight, bent forward towards it.

"Jessie," whispered he from behind.

She turned, and could only utter the well-beloved name—"William."

They gazed on each other for a minute in silence. At length William made a motion as if to advance to embrace her.

"Stop, stop," she exclaimed, hurriedly; "this must not be. Why, O why are you here just now?"

"I thought not of meeting you; but since we are thrown together once more, may we not speak to each other? Surely we who love so fondly and so purely may, at least, preserve our friendship."

"Yes, Heaven forbid that we should ever cease to be friends," said Jessie, with emotion; "but in our present circumstances, it were better not to meet. For the present, at least, we must be strangers to each other."

"Strangers! O Jessie, this is terrible. Is it not enough that we have voluntarily resolved to forego our contemplated union? Must we embitter the sacrifice by the cessation of all intercourse?"

"No," she replied, "there is no necessity for embittering the sacrifice; but it must be truly consummated, and, to be morally complete, it requires this also. What has the betrothed, almost the wedded husband of Grace Fergusson, to do now with Jessie Melville? Since we could only speak to

each other of forbidden things, heart cherishings, and former affection, it behoves us to remain apart."

"*Former affection!*" repeated William, reproachfully; "and has your love for me now departed? Do you no longer feel that regard for me which you so very lately professed? I looked not for this, expected not this."

"William, you forget what is due to three persons—Grace, yourself, and me. What we could formerly cherish with a sacred and pure intensity, must now be repressed, if we would refrain from sin. Those feelings of the heart which we once cultivated so fondly and assiduously, that they blossomed with unstinted profusion, must be suffered to decay. Duty, like a frosty north wind, sternly and roughly sweeps over them, and before its power they must wither and die. It may be impossible to root them up. Alas! I fear that at this moment they are as fresh and green with both of us as they ever were; but this is wrong, very wrong. It were but a mockery to profess to make the sacrifice, and still indulge in the old imaginings. This were indeed to come before the God of duty with a spurious offering. No, no, William; you and I, when we met, could only talk on one subject; common-place topics would be agony to us, therefore it were better, far better, not to meet at all. I trust, however, you understand me; for," she added, with a sad earnestness, "I would be intensely pained were you to think of me as your last words indicated—as heartless and shallow in my affections."

"I do indeed understand you," was the reply, "and can only feel ashamed of the bluntness of my moral sense. To an exquisitely fine sensitive nature you can add the rarest of combinations—a correct judgment, and a clear understanding. Your strength of mind o'errides your emotions

and controls them. With your firm resolution, you can regulate your conduct 'midst the fiercest war of the moral elements. Like the Mighty One on the wild Galilean lake, you can say to the raging waves, 'Peace, be still,' and immediately there is a great calm. Jessie, I envy and admire your noble nature."

"Hush!" she said, with a tearful blush. "If you knew me as I know myself, you would make a far lower estimate. Strong and firm as you think me, I often lose the day. My emotional nature, too, often successfully rebels. But, come, let us leave this subject; it will but increase the pain of both of us to dwell upon it."

"Then, must I depart? May we not converse together any longer?"

"Not unless we can give and impart strength to each other for the event of the morrow and its consequences to us," replied the heroic girl. "See, I am busy with your bride's wedding-dress." And she looked in his face with a faint inquiring smile.

"Well," he replied, sadly, "I am vain enough to think that you will be the greatest sufferer. The blow cannot fall so heavily upon me. I have always liked Grace, though I never loved her. She is a kind-hearted, amiable girl, and her society is agreeable to me. I will, therefore, have many things around me to lessen the trial. But you—O, my heart bleeds for you! You have nothing to fall back upon—no assuaging comfort in the dark valley into which you have gone. O, my sacrifice is nothing—nothing to yours!"

Had William studiously sought to reach Jessie's weakness, he could not have done it more effectually. She indeed felt that hers was the bitterest part to bear. She had seen the future standing before her as a huge black

mass, lighted up by no ray, and had shudderingly forbore to gaze stedfastly upon it; when her lover, therefore, alluded to it so pathetically, she felt her firmness giving way. She turned pale, trembled, and the tears rushed to her eyes. William noticed her emotion, and would have instinctively clasped her in his arms, as he had been wont to do; but even at that trying moment she recalled with a strong will her self-command, and motioned him back.

"You have touched me in the tenderest part," she faintly murmured; "but 'tis well not to think much of my life-prospects. Besides, I *have* some strong supports. That inward peace and satisfaction which ever follows on a discharged duty, attends me, and in my——, in Lady Ainslie, I possess a kind and tender friend."

"Yes," he answered, "my mother will do her utmost to cheer and soothe you. Through her, at least, we shall constantly hear of each other, and know of each other's welfare."

"It will be my greatest bliss to know that you are happy. Once more, William, farewell!" And as she spoke, she hurried past him, and left the room; for the sound of the door-bell warned her that the ladies had returned.

Time, which accomplishes all things—which moves not fast to dissipate sorrow, nor slow to prolong enjoyment, but in the midst of the most distracting of human affairs, progresses with an eternal steadiness—brought at length the marriage-day. Its morning was lovely—fair, serene, and bright—as befits such a joyful occasion. All the nature visible within the city seemed to rejoice. The birds, that flew from tree to bush in Queen Street Gardens, chirruped briskly. A chirrup, by-the-by, is the nearest approach to singing which birds make in the town. They never get

out their country notes, evidently feeling that it would be entirely out of place to pour forth their melody there. Methinks if we were to pause by the side of the iron railings, and ask one of the little feathery hoppers to sing us one of the songs of the forest, and could we receive a reply, it would be in these words—"How can we sing our woodland song in a strange land?" Very true, little warbler, how can you? Where is the free summer breeze, and the murmuring of the crystal stream, to inspire you? Where, amid the rattle of wheels, and the tramp of business-men, is the calmness and the silence that loves to dwell upon your music, and that you, in turn, love to bless with your harmony? In vain would you strive to raise your sweet voices above the din of human life; and therefore do ye remain "majestically dumb," reproving men, if they could but discern it, for the hot, unseemly haste with which they run the race for riches, but, rushing frantically on in their hard, narrow way, they see you not, and heed not your silence. Why do ye not, ye scorned and despised ones, flee away to your free, happy country homes, where the peasant and the wild deer would listen admiringly to your harmony? Ah! you are waiting till the happy golden age we all hope for shall have come—when the dwellers in cities shall loathe their present joys, and sit at the feet of nature, and bow reverently before the throne of nature's God—when they shall return to purer and simpler ways, and love and long to hear the music of birds in their streets. Patient little waiters, can you tell us how long it will be till that joyous time come when you, with all God's other works, shall be honoured and cherished as you ought? How long, O, little birds, how long?

Well, but the bright warm summer sunshine has a

cheering influence even on town birds; and so it happened that, on this particular morning, they chirruped away right gleefully. The smoke of the city, of course, rose as usual, but a fresh air from the sea prevented it from lingering above the house-tops. It went away, in straggling disorder, over the Pentland Hills, and was seen no more. The rich foliage of many shades, which separated Queen Street from Heriot Row, was most pleasant to the eyes, and a blessed object to turn to from the dull grey sandstone of the houses. Overhead there stretched a gorgeous canopy of blue, all unbroken, save here and there where a small fleecy cloud sailed, or rather floated along,

"As if an angel, in his upward flight,
Had left his mantle floating in the air."

Nevertheless, though this was a glorious morning, and the morning, too, of a marriage-day, the Modern Athenians were going to and fro as much absorbed in business as ever. They knew not, cared not to know, that William Ainslie and Grace Fergusson were about to be united in the holy bonds of matrimony. What were these two individuals to them, that they should take their minds or their eyes off their work to think about or look upon them? Well, well, canny Edinburgh folks, though you did not care about the event at the time, perhaps you will now, when you know the various outs and ins of the matter—when you know something about those who are going to be married, and those who are *not* going to be married—especially that pale, beautiful, heroic girl, Jessie Melville, who sacrificed herself for a weaker sister.

On this particular morning, we cannot suppose that Jessie was altogether comfortable. The ceremony that

was about to be performed was in itself trying to her; but being forced by circumstances to be present, and wear a gay face in unison with the occasion, this made it doubly painful. It was with a heavy, shrinking, yet not repentant heart, that she left her sleepless pillow to meet the stern realities before her.

Nor was William Ainslie very happy, though it was his wedding-day. The event, usually so interesting to, and longed for by bridegrooms, was, in his case, the placing of an impassable barrier between himself and the object of his dearest affection, and, therefore, we cannot expect him to be particularly enamoured of it. He, too, left a sleepless pillow, and donned with a sombre air his gay habiliments.

Lady Ainslie, also, was in no way delighted with the anticipated occurrence, but rather the opposite. Happening to know, like our readers, the peculiarly-striking facts of the case, she had no great reason to rejoice. Being aware that it was not a marriage of affection, but of benevolence, and that it separated from each other those she most loved, she could not possibly regard it with much favour.

With these three exceptions, however, all the parties concerned were in great spirits and happy expectation. The two little girls were highly delighted, for they were to be dressed in white, and see all the grand company. Mrs Ferguson was proud, for her daughter was to be united to the object of *her* choice, and that object she knew to be very worthy. Grace herself was wildly happy, for the day that had dawned was one she once expected not to see, though she longed for it with despairing ardour. But Sir William—O, Sir William was in his glory. To-day was to see the fruition of his twenty-five years' dream—the accomplishment of a plan which he had cherished so devotedly, that, to

secure it, he was ready to debase his character, and heap a heavy sin upon his soul. It had come at last—the important day that united Broomfield Park and the Grange. His plans, though at one time threatened with a miscarriage, had come to a triumphant development; therefore he, of all the others, was supremely, complacently happy.

It was still an early hour when the pair stood up before the minister—one of the eighteen city clergymen, but *which* we will not say—and the company stood looking on. The bridesmaid and groomsmen were at hand to pull off the gloves, and the couple were listening to the words that were to make them man and wife—one flesh. Back at the wall, behind all the others, stood Jessie Melville, and by her side was Lady Ainslie, for she knew that at that fearful moment she required the presence of a supporting hand, and she only could render the support required.

It was soon, very soon done, and William Ainslie and Grace Fergusson were irrevocably united. A terrible sacrifice had been made—a foolish, because headstrong, love had been gratified—a sinful desire had been realized—all these things had been accomplished by the few words and forms of that simple ceremony. And now the party begins to break up. The minister has to go to marry another couple in the Old Town, and the newly-wedded pair must start immediately, for they have to travel to the Grange to-day, and, long as the day is, it is hardly long enough to get there, and get settled in the house before night; therefore, they must just hurry away; and as all the others had been convened solely on their account, they have nothing to keep them longer. The carriage is at the door, and the young couple shake hands with all—with Jessie amongst the rest. They go down the steps, enter the vehicle, and are whirled rapidly away.

"Come with me," said Lady Ainslie to Jessie, as the carriage departed; and she led the trembling girl to her own room. Once there, and the door shut, she silently opened her arms, and, with a wild burst of grief, the sacrificing one threw herself into the blessed haven of shelter—far more blessed and prized than the kind old lady imagined.

Long lay Jessie there, and wept unrestrainedly, for Lady Ainslie knew it would do her good. Her overcharged heart must be relieved, for it sadly needed relief; and what so calculated to give it as a free shower of tears shed in the bosom of a loving, sympathizing friend? In the natural world, when the dark, lowering cloud that has long been keeping up its burden, at length opens its vapoury gates, and lets it come down on the bosom of mother earth, how refreshed and strengthened is everything by the outpouring! And so, in the moral or spiritual world, a wounded heart that has for long treasured up its burden of grief, when it gets opportunity to flow it out in tears, experiences a blessed revival, and gathers strength for future endurance.

It was so with Jessie. A calmness and a joy, which she herself wondered at, stole over her soul as she lay in her mother's arms, and felt these arms kindly encircling her. At length her weeping subsided into sobs, and these, too, finally ceased, so that ere long she lay quiet and silent.

"You must let me call you daughter still," whispered Lady Ainslie, softly and tenderly in her ear. "Say, am I not your mother!"

"You are, you are!" exclaimed Jessie, with a rapturous emotion, and nestled still more closely in her bosom.

How literally true were the words, yet how little did Lady Ainslie dream that they were so!

CHAPTER XIII.

SUNSET.

A FEW weeks after the marriage, a messenger arrived one morning at Heriot Row, with intelligence that Grace was alarmingly ill, and pleaded earnestly for Jessie's presence at the Grange. Mrs Fergusson had been staying there for some days previously, and the messenger was the bearer of the following note from her:—

“Dear Miss Melville,—I am grieved to inform you that Grace, who, as you know, became unwell on the day of her marriage, while journeying with William to their home, has daily become worse, and we are all intensely alarmed about her. She has pleaded with us to send for you, and is even now longing for your arrival. Pray do come for the sake of your poor friend. The children can be left to the care of Maggie for a few days. The bearer will conduct you safely on your journey.

E. FERGUSSON.”

Here was another trial for the poor girl; to go to the home of the newly-wedded, and again meet William Ainslie—the husband of another. Yet she hesitated not. If her presence and attentions could prove solacing to the suffering Grace, she did not feel warranted to stay back merely because her own feelings might be lacerated, and her wounded heart, still bleeding and smarting, probed anew. It was but another drop added to the cup which a Father's hand had

mingled for her, and a Father's disciplining love given her to drink. She would not, therefore, refuse it, or turn it from her lips; so she went.

The slanting sunbeams fell brightly on the tall old elms that lined the avenue to the old-fashioned Grange, as the carriage in which Jessie travelled approached the mansion, and the many windows that dotted the western gable shone like burnished gold. All was silent and motionless. No sound was heard in or near the house—no one appeared at the threshold to welcome her. As the carriage drew up at the principal entrance, the heavy, iron-bound door moved slowly on its hinges, and a servant appeared; who, when Jessie had alighted, led her into a small room—the window curtains of which were closely drawn—and informed her that Mrs Fergusson would see her presently.

"How is Grace—I mean Mrs Ainslie?" asked Jessie, quietly, yet anxiously.

"No better," was the response. "She is becoming weaker and weaker. Mrs Fergusson and Mr Ainslie never leave her bedside."

In a few moments after the departure of the servant, Mrs Fergusson entered the room. Jessie was shocked to see how careworn she looked. Her eyes were red and heavy, as if from want of sleep, her frame was apparently worn out, and the deep anxiety apparent on her countenance gave to it a sad, suffering expression.

"My dear Miss Melville," she exclaimed, as she fell on Jessie's shoulder, and gave way to a burst of grief, "how kind of you to come! Grace has been wearying for you for many hours.

"I trust her condition is not such as to warrant such fears as I see you cherish," said Jessie, tenderly.

"Alas, yes! The worst is to be apprehended. The doctor called me from her bedside this afternoon, and told me to prepare for her death, for it was at no great distance." And again did the poor mother burst into uncontrollable grief—a grief which Jessie vainly strove to assuage, for the tidings had filled her own soul with much sorrow.

"O let me go to her now," she said; "let me take my post immediately by her sick-bed, and, perhaps, the patient and unwearied attention of those who love her may yet save her."

Her words sent hope once more to the mother's heart; and silently pressing her hand, she led the way up stairs. Having first taken her to the room prepared for her, and got her to lay aside her travelling garments, she approached the chamber of the invalid, and Jessie followed in breathless silence. They made no sound when they entered, so that the parties within were ignorant of their presence.

On a chaste, white curtained bed, lay Grace; and bending over her, with earnest gaze, was her husband. Her eyes were closed. One hand, which lay above the counterpane, was clasped in William's. Her face was pale—O how very pale; not whiter were the hangings which surrounded her, or the sheet that covered her. Jessie approached on tip-toe, thinking she slept; but the quick ear of the sufferer detected her steps, silent though they were. She opened her large blue eyes, and a gleam of joy leapt into them as she recognised her friend. She uttered not a word, but stretched out her arms towards her. In a moment Jessie had enfolded her in a close, passionate embrace, and her tears fell fast on the pillow.

"My poor, poor Grace," whispered Jessie, as she pressed her to her bosom; "how sorry I am to see you thus. How



**"On a chaste, white-curtained bed, lay Grace; and lending
over her, with earnest gaze, was her husband."—Page 154.**

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willingly would I at this moment occupy your place, if thereby you might be restored to health again."

"Hush, my kind, kind friend," answered Grace, in a low weak voice. "All our crosses and trials are appointed us by our heavenly Father, and we must not murmur, or speak of exchanging with one another. But O, how glad I am that you are come. I longed so ardently to see you once more; to hear your voice and see your face as I passed through the dark valley. Methought its gloom would be less profound, and its loneliness less terrible, if you were by."

"O talk not thus," said Jessie, with deep emotion. "I came not to see you die, but to do my best to get you well again."

"Never, never shall I recover, Jessie dear. I feel, I know, that I am dying. Day by day, almost hour by hour, do I see the shadows lengthening around me, and coming closer towards me. And mine is not a sun-dial whose shadow can go ten degrees backward. But grieve not thus. I indeed feel keenly to leave you all; to bid farewell to life, in the first flush of my marriage joy—to leave my noble William, whom I love so fondly, and pass away into darkness and silence; but for myself, I grieve not, *and fear not*. My mind is made up now. For a time I shrank back and prayed for life; but now, *now*, I am quite ready to die."

Jessie could say nothing in reply to words like these; she could only weep like the others.

Turning to William and her mother, the invalid desired them, now that she had got Jessie beside her, to go and take some rest. They had indeed need of it. For several nights they had both watched by her couch, and by day they never left it.

"But Miss Melville must be tired with travelling," said William, with his wonted consideration; "she had better take a little rest first."

"No, indeed," answered Jessie, eagerly; "I assure you I am quite able to attend here for many hours. Let me, then, urge you both to retire."

They reluctantly obeyed, and the dying girl and friend were left alone.

"Do you feel much pain?" asked Jessie, as Grace lay silent, with her large eyes fixed lovingly on her face.

"Not now; I did some days ago, but it is gone. I prayed for its departure, that I might die calmly and peacefully, and my prayer has been answered. I feel now that I shall sink to my rest very tranquilly."

"May not this rather be a sign that you will be restored?" suggested Jessie, in hopeful tones.

"No, no, my dearest friend; I cannot be either flattered or deceived on this point. My strength is rapidly and noiselessly ebbing away. Nature has ceased to battle longer; and the destroyer, finding no longer any opposition, is doing his work kindly—*yet surely*. Finding this to be the case, I longed to have you here, to have a few farewell words, and receive from you a *Scotch convoy*. You will not deny me this latter, will you?" she inquired, with a smile. "I have a long journey before me; will you not see me safely on the way?"

"O yes, if Heaven willed it, cheerfully would I go step by step by your side all the way through."

"Ah, impossible," replied the invalid, solemnly. "This is a journey which every one must make *alone*. No friend, no companion can travel with a human spirit through the dark valley. The dying one's bed may be surrounded with

kind, yearning sympathizers, but they cannot come beyond the edge of the thick darkness into which the dying one must go. Even those who are travelling through the gloom at the same hour travel all apart. Yes, it must be so; we must, then, be alone—and yet not alone, for the Father is with us.”

Jessie was amazed at the firmness and self-possession manifested by Grace in prospect of death, and more so at the beauty and loftiness of her thoughts. Though she had known her for several months most intimately, she had never perceived in her mental character any of that sublime superiority which at this moment appeared. She had always considered her to be kind, amiable, and intelligent, strong in affection, and correct in feeling, but had never seen her display any high intellectual powers. She wondered, therefore, with great admiration, when she addressed her in such a calm, triumphant manner.

But both Jessie and ourselves have hitherto seen Grace Fergusson under a great disadvantage; we have seen her only under a cloud—a cloud which hopelessly wrapped itself around her, and obscured, in a great measure, her character. Her love for William Ainslie was a weakness against which she wrestled long and vigorously, but without success, and, in despair, she yielded up her powers both of body and mind to the spell. But now that spell is broken. Her marriage with the idol of her heart opened the prison-house in which her faculties had long lain bound, and once more they came into play.

Besides this, Grace was near death; and how often does it happen that an unnatural spiritual insight is developed at that dread hour? Very many, when brought face to face with the grim king, get the eyes of their understanding

opened, and they behold the philosophy of many things which they mastered not before. Human life, and moral truth, as seen from the view-point of earth's confines, are discerned in their fulness and exactitude much more clearly than before, and hence the words of the dying are often weighty words, and their thoughts lofty thoughts.

For many days Jessie Melville watched closely by the death-bed of Grace, and frequently along with William Ainslie, her husband. During all that time, they neither by word or look alluded to former things, but both ministered with eager and affectionate hands to the object of their solicitude. One day Jessie left the sick-room to breathe the fresh air a few moments in the garden. She went down the long stair slowly and musingly, so that she did not observe that some one was coming up. Suddenly she lifted up her eyes, and beheld Sir William Ainslie before her. He had stopped, and was standing gazing at her with astonishment. Spell-bound he literally seemed, and wholly unable to move; and the stair being narrow, Jessie could not pass without absolutely pushing against him. So there they stood, father and daughter, gazing at each other—on his side, with earnest bewilderment; on hers, with fear mixed with indignation. It was the resemblance she bore to Lady Ainslie that puzzled and astonished him. She was the very image of his wife, as she appeared in her youthful gracefulness, in the spring-tide of her marriage loveliness, when his heart was filled only by her beauty, and beat with the wildest affection for her. And who, then, was this that resembled her so closely, or was it only a vision that he beheld? He was truly bewildered, and could only stand and gaze.

Jessie felt her situation very uncomfortable, but at this moment Lady Ainslie came into the lobby and terminate

the scene. Looking up, and seeing Jessie on the stair, in the impulse of the moment she called out her name. Overjoyed by her sudden appearance, Jessie rushed past the still amazed Sir William, and flew into her mother's arms. Then both of them perceived the imprudence of their conduct, but it was too late, and Lady Ainslie saw that an explanation to her husband was inevitable.

The baronet, after gazing down upon them for a moment, turned slowly round, and continued his assent, and his lady hastened to follow him.

"I will see you again, my love," she whispered, releasing her from her embrace; "but first I must visit poor Grace."

Lady Ainslie overtook the baronet at the door of the sick-room, and in answer to his displeased look, said, with some confusion,

"That is Miss Melville, the governess of Mrs Ferguson's grandchildren."

He spoke not, but an angry cloud lowered on his brow. The name—Jessie—had evidently discovered to him who she was, and apparently he was anything but gratified; but this was not the time or place for remark, and in silence they entered the room of death. Its sacredness and solemnity chased away for the time all but awe-inspiring thoughts, and as the baronet and his wife gazed on the dying Grace, the matter was forgotten by both.

Not long after this, on a beautiful evening, when the sunlight was mellow and golden, and beauty and silence rested on the face of nature, the inmates of the Grange were assembled to witness the last moments of the young wife. The dying one had herself requested them to come, for she felt that the sun of her existence was as near the horizon as the bright orb of day which now lay broad and

full over the gates of the west. And yet, to an observer, death did not seem so near at hand as sometime before. Grace appeared stronger, her voice was clearer, her eye brighter, and her cheek redder. Alas! this was but the prelude to the change—the last brightening flicker of the taper ere it finally went out. Others might take these as tokens for good, and think they meant a reviving of the worn-out frame; but *she*, while also taking them as tokens for good, knew they meant something very different and very opposite. By her their import was not misinterpreted, and she rejoiced that she would be enabled to converse with those she loved, as she was parted from them.

On one side of the bed was her husband, and on the other her youthful friend; while at the foot stood her mother—all three looking on with tearful eyes and throbbing hearts.

“What a lovely hour to die in!” murmured Grace, as she gazed through the open window, from which a wide and glowing prospect was beheld. Hill and dale, wood and field, were bathed in a flood of soft evening sunlight, and the air was balmy with the fragrance of ten thousand flowers.

Both William and Mrs Fergusson were too much overpowered to make any reply to Grace’s last words, but Jessie’s mind rose to the sublime scene she was contemplating. At first, when called to stand by Grace’s death-bed, excitement confused her mind, and prostrated her faculties; but the composed demeanour, and high-toned sentiments of the departing girl, dissipated her dread, and her strong heroic mind could now calmly view the scene, and respond to the remarks which Grace made. She understood her thoroughly now; and as she cherished the same views of human things,

and the same aspirations after beauty and truth, she felt animated by Grace's spirit, and was indeed prepared to give her a *Scotch convoy*,* as the dying one had beautifully expressed it.

"It is, indeed, a blessing to leave the world surrounded by such a splendid scene," answered she; "it robs death of half its terrors; the outward beauty and repose is reflected on the mind, and gives it somewhat of its delightful calmness. I, too, should like to die at the time of a summer sunset. But tell me, my dear, dear Grace, do you feel quite happy in the prospect of death?—is your descending sun free from all clouds?"

"No, nor do I wish it. Which is the most beautiful and gorgeous natural sunset—that which lights up the western sky with a red, fiery, cloudless glow, or that which covers it with a cloudy splendour?—not a splendour which the sun shines through, but one which surrounds and encircles him? We all know that it is the latter. And so with a human sunset. It is unseemly to see all doubts and fears, all apprehensions and perplexities, vanish on this side time; but let these cluster thick around the down-going orb, and let a strong, unwavering faith resolve them into fleecy gold-tipped surroundings, and they give glory to the scene. So surrounded is my descending sun. No dark troubled storm-clouds are there; neither are there any clouds before it; but on all sides the mists and uncertainties which belong to mortality are congregated—many of them, however, now fleecy and thin, and all illuminated more or less by the light of a blessed future."

* A Scotch convoy, or as it would be more properly termed, a *Kelso* convoy, consists in seeing a friend or visitor to the threshold of his house, but going no farther.

Jessie glanced at William to see if he was as amazed and gratified as herself by these dying reflections. He was truly astonished. Never had Grace appeared so lovely, so attractive as now, when she lay breathing out her young life in noble utterances. Sad and painful as was the scene, he felt constrained to say within himself—"It is good to be here. Surely this is none other than the gate of heaven."

Jessie was satisfied. She saw that he both wondered and admired, though for the time his fine manly nature was prostrated, and he could not respond to the remarks of his dying wife. With Jessie it was different. The grandeur of the moment, and its surpassing solemnity, overcame her woman's weakness, and gave a sort of inspiration to her mind, which, quickened by strong affection, became prepared to supply comfort and support to the dying one at the terrible moment of dissolution.

That moment was now rapidly drawing near. The utterance of the last words had completely exhausted Grace, and she knew that strength would never again return; yet was she anxious to take another farewell of them all before she was finally unable.

"Mother," she whispered, "in a few moments more I shall be unable to speak. Receive my last good-bye. Let Jessie be your daughter now; she is every way better than the one you are losing."

Poor Mrs Fergusson, weeping as only mothers can weep, kissed her daughter, and enfolded her in a last, long embrace.

"William," continued Grace, turning to her husband, "our heavenly Father has not willed our union to be long. Let us both bow to His decree. Farewell for time—we shall meet again;" and she bent on him a look of ardent, speech-

less love. He would have spoken an adieu, but could not. He silently pressed her to his heart, and "lifted up his voice and wept."

To Jessie she now turned, and, as well as she was able, spoke her gratitude and thanks to that matchless girl for all her kindness to her. These leave-takings were the last efforts nature could make. She could now neither move nor speak, but the eye showed that she was perfectly conscious, and retained all her mental powers.

She looked fixedly at her friend—and, as Jessie thought, pleadingly. She had now plainly entered the valley, and wanted her thoughts directed to consoling dwelling-places. Bending down to her ear, Jessie whispered—

"'Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.'"

A smile of joy lighted up the face of the departing girl as she listened to the divine words. Jessie had rightly interpreted her desire. She wished parting words of comfort, and what could be better than the sublime promises and hopes of the Bible? Jessie laid her head close to that of Grace, and, at intervals, repeated the following joyful texts:—

"'He shall deliver thee in six troubles, yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee.'

"'The Lord thy God is mighty; He will save thee, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in his love, He will joy over thee with singing.'

"'In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you; and will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am there ye may be also.'

"'The sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for

brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory.'

"'Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.'

"'The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them to living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.'"

A seraphic smile, at this moment, broke upon Grace's countenance, on which a ray of the setting sun brightly rested, giving it a hue of more than mortal glory. Another instant and it vanished, along with the last breath and the last sigh. The smile remained, but the life was gone.

"She is dead!" said William, solemnly. Jessie looked out to the far western horizon—the sun had set.

CHAPTER XIV.

VILLANOUS SCHEMES.

Two mornings after Grace Fergusson's death, a little, middle-aged man might have been seen passing up East Register Street, and turning into St James' Square. We don't say he *was* seen, for the Edinburgh folks are not in the habit of taking notice of street perambulators. There are so many people continually passing and repassing, that one more or less is neither missed nor gazed after, unless he be a well-known character, continually going about, or one having something peculiar about his history, figure, or dress. Thus, many years ago, when the infamous Burke and Hare were perpetrating their hellish atrocities in that dark, grim, forsaken house in the West Port, Daft Jamie was missed when he was not as usual seen going about; and very lately, we all know how the gigantic form and fantastic dress of Gordon Cumming attracted observation, when he used to march along Princes Street, or elsewhere.

But a common-looking person passes quite unheeded through the thoroughfares of Auld Reekie; and so it is very likely, that on the morning to which we refer, the gentleman (?), whom we are about to introduce to the reader, was particularly observed by nobody as he passed quickly up by the end of the Register Office.

And yet he was somewhat of a noteworthy person in his

way. He was dressed in a suit of shining black, wore a white neckerchief, carried a stick (not a cane), and was, withal a staid, little respectable-looking personage.

We say respectable-looking, but when the reader comes to know him a bit, he will very likely be of opinion that he is not just a model man, though he has such a decent exterior. Examine even his outward man a little narrowly, and you will see indications of a questionable interior. He has got a pair of sharp grey eyes in his head, which turn slyly in all directions. His face, too, is sharp, his nose is sharp, his features are sharp—in fact, he looks sharp altogether. Had he not his hat on, you would see that close above his brow, where benevolence is said to reside, there is a decided decline; and, if you are a phrenologist, and could get his cranium examined, you would be clearly of opinion that he was clever, but unscrupulous, totally devoid of feeling, had little regard for principle, had a keen eye for the main chance, and stuck at none of those moral hindrances which most people, thank Heaven, consider insurmountable.

Now, this was just the character of the man we refer to. Among his neighbours, however, and by the world, he was thought very differently of. Everybody deemed him a civil, amiable, just-dealing person; for he had a smooth, oily way of conducting himself—of using honied words and polite phrases. Those, however, who knew him intimately or professionally, and could judge somewhat truly of his character, deemed him to be a very different man.

But we are keeping him too long in the street. He passed into one of the common-stair entries in St James' Square. The particular entry we will not mention. Suffice it to say, that it was not far from No. 5, where the *North Briton* Newspaper Office lately was. Does the reader ask

who this individual was, what he was, and where he lived ? He was Mr Daniel Hooker, a lawyer, resident in the village of Broomfield, and patronized by Sir William Ainslie and neighbouring country gentlemen. For the rest, and his connection with this story, let subsequent events explain.

He ascended the stair, and knocked at a door on the second flat, on which was painted in neat, little, black letters, "Mrs ——'s Lodgings."

"Is Mr Robert Fergusson within ?" he inquired at the girl who opened the door.

"Yes, sir," was the reply ; and he was immediately ushered into a room, in which sat a youngish man at breakfast.

"Hooker, by all that's gracious !" exclaimed the youth, when he caught sight of his visitor.

"Well, Bob, how do you do ?" said Hooker. "I thought I should catch you ere you went out this morning, and I have not been mistaken."

"Have you come to town this morning ?"

"No, but last night late ; and I knew it was no use to call here then."

"Oh, you thought I would be out—as usual. Know, then, most immaculate brother-in-law of mine, that you were mistaken. I had a party here last night ; that accounts for the confusion you see.

"Well, I should not have thought you in spirits for company after your late disappointment.

"You refer to Miss Fergusson's marriage ? Well, I must confess that *was* a disappointment ; though, after all, I could hardly expect a young girl like her to be long unmarried."

"Well, now, I think you had some cause for even that

thought. You know *one* offer at least which she refused."

"Yes, *I* was certainly rejected; but the reason, I have no doubt, was, that some rumours of my character reached her. You know, Dan, my character, like that of somebody not far off, cannot stand a very minute investigation."

"Thank you; you are complimentary this morning."

"Not a bit. If the coat does not fit you, don't put it on. It certainly does not harmonize with the glossy black one you have got on your back at this moment; but your coat, Hooker, is like your manner—it gives no index of the man."

"Well, your plainness of speech I forgive, seeing that you are my brother-in-law," said Hooker with a meek expression of countenance.

"Oh, don't let the relationship make you suffer an unjust insinuation," replied the other. "If it is true, it is not less true because it is spoken by your brother-in-law; and if it is false, it is no less injurious or offensive, because uttered by so near a relation. But why should we waste words on this point? You and I know each other thoroughly, and know exactly what stuff we are made of. None of us have much to boast of; the greatest difference between us being, that my bad character is generally known, while yours is not. Between ourselves, however, we need not beat about the bush. With you I am plain Bob Fergusson, the rake and gambler; with me, you are Daniel Hooker, the—unprincipled lawyer."

"And does Bob Fergusson mean to tell his acquaintances the opinion he has formed of Daniel Hooker?" asked the latter, in a quiet yet anxious tone.

"O, no," replied Fergusson, carelessly. "This would do me no manner of good earthly. If you can maintain your

present good character in the eyes of the world, it would be poor spite in me to break it. You may consider yourself perfectly safe on that point, so far as I am concerned."

Hooker looked relieved. He was afraid of the rattling, careless manner of Bob Fergusson, who, though not practically a whit better than the lawyer, was not, like him, hypocritical. For Daniel Hooker was one who had faithfully obeyed Hamlet's unsound advice to his mother—he had assumed a virtue which he did not possess, and was, therefore, liable at any moment to have his true nature detected.

The lawyer resumed the conversation by saying—"Let us come back, however, to this marriage. You must, of course, have considered it a final blow to your hopes of inheriting the Grange?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, my hopes in this direction were never very great. Even had Grace Fergusson not married, she would, doubtless, live as long as me; or if she died before me, she would, in all probability, make a legal settlement of her affairs; and so, any way you take it, my chance was small. Seeing this, I counted little upon it, and am, therefore, not much disappointed."

"Quite right. Then the turn of the wheel in your favour would prove a most joyful surprise to you?"

"No doubt of that; but of this there is no likelihood."

"Perhaps more than you imagine," said Hooker significantly.

Fergusson looked fixedly at him; there was a slight smile on his face, which showed he had something to communicate.

"What do you mean?" said Bob.

"*Grace Fergusson is dead!*" said the lawyer slowly, yet laconically.

"Dead!" repeated Fergusson, and sprang up from his chair. "When or how did she die?"

"She took ill on her way home on the marriage day, and died last Tuesday night about sunset."

"Whew!" whistled Bob, with joyful wonder. "Then the Grange is mine, the Grange is mine," he said, and he began to dance about the room.

"Stop a bit, lad," said Hooker, with a malicious smile; "don't rejoice too soon; *she left a will.*"

"Confound it," returned Fergusson, stopping short, and throwing himself dejectedly into his seat. "Why did you not say so at first? What's the use of raising a fellow to such an elevated pitch, and then dashing him down again? Who gets the estate, then?"

"Her husband, young Ainslie, is the person named in the will."

"Of course, I need scarcely have asked. Then what did you mean by talking significantly of the wheel turning in my favour?"

"I meant a great deal," said Hooker, looking to see if the door was shut. Then approaching his chair close to Bob's, he whispered—"The will is in my possession."

"Oh, you made it, did you! But how can this serve me? Can you suppress it?"

"That is a matter for consideration," replied the cautious lawyer; "and it is to consult with you about it that I am now here."

"But is it at all possible?" said Bob.

"I think it is: but you shall hear. A day or two after the marriage, Ainslie drove his wife over to Broomfield Park, where they stayed for a little while. One day she came alone to my office, and hurriedly inquired if I could draw

out a will for her. Of course, Bob, I could not say no, though I guessed you would suffer by it. Well, the will, leaving her estate real and personal to William Ainslie, was legally made, witnessed, and signed. She left it in my care, informed me that no one knew of it, and begged me not to disclose its existence except in the event of her death, when I was to produce it for the benefit of her husband. She had no idea, of course, that Bob Fergusson was my brother-in-law, or she might have hesitated to put so much in my power; and never dreaming that I could have any inducement to keep back the document, she most unsuspectingly left the matter solely in my hands. You understand the thing now?"

"Perfectly," answered Bob. "But what about the witnesses? Won't they blab?"

"I think not. One of them, at least, can't; and the other won't, or rather dare not. One was my housekeeper, who fortunately died last week; the other is a poacher, who happened to be legally consulting me as to a threatened prosecution by Sir William, when Grace called. His silence I can secure, for he is in my power."

"All seems, then, sailing fair for me," said Fergusson. "Of course, there can be no hesitation as to the course to pursue. The will must be withheld."

"Ahem!—yes, certainly, if—if——"

"If I make it worth your while, you mean?" added Bob. "Well, let us not waste time on this point. What are your demands?"

"The estate is worth three thousand a-year," said Hooker.

"So I believe," answered Bob; "yet what is *your* sum?"

"Five thousand pounds," replied Hooker, bluntly.

"Can't be done," was the cool, decided rejoinder.

"Can't? and why not?" inquired the lawyer, with surprise.

"Because I consider it too much. A fifth of the sum is sufficient,—and one thousand pounds it shall be."

"Hardly, unless I consent," said Hooker, with a dry sneer. "I believe I am the person to name the sum in this transaction?"

"Not at all," returned Bob; "I am the paying party, and have a right to say what I consider *just*. You understand the meaning I attach to the last word. The sum I have named is, in my opinion, sufficient for the service rendered. It shall, therefore, be neither more nor less."

"You forget that I have the power to frustrate the whole scheme, by quietly putting the will into young Ainslie's hands," said the lawyer, drily.

"No, I don't forget it. But this you will not do."

"And why?"

"For three sufficient reasons, as Rob Roy says. First, Daniel, for auld lang syne; second, for the guid wife that did *once* sit at hame ayont the fire, and mak some mixture in our bluid; and thirdly, and lastly, Lawyer Hooker, because you have a respect for your character in Broomfield, which you know would not be worth a moment's purchase after you delivered up the will to William Ainslie."

"I thought you said but now that I might consider myself safe on that point so far as you were concerned?"

"So I did, but I gave you the reason: I then saw no object in betraying you. This object would be fully supplied if you did what you hint at, and be assured I should feel no hesitation in having my revenge."

Hooker saw he was fairly in Bob's power, and was enraged at his helpless situation; nevertheless, he was re-

solved to "do" him by some means or other, and for the present feigned to consent to his terms.

"You are really too hard upon me, Bob," he said, graciously, after a pause. "However, I see I am in your hands, and must submit. For a thousand pounds, then, I am ready to put the will into your possession."

"That is a very sensible resolution, Daniel; be sure that on my side the compact will be fulfilled."

"You had better be out immediately to take possession," suggested Hooker; "at all events, I shall expect an invitation to the Grange very soon."

"I shall not disappoint you. When does the funeral take place? I suppose I must attend it, for decency's sake."

"On Monday, I understand; but you will likely receive an invitation, if they have your address."

"If one is sent, it will come to Gibb's Hotel: that is the only address they know. But are you for off that you have seized your hat?"

"Yes, I must go," said the lawyer, who had now risen. "Our little business was the only thing that brought me to Edinburgh: as that is so amicably settled, I shall return to-day."

And the two callous scoundrels parted, having thus arranged, without compunction, and apparently with no misgivings, the villanous scheme for defrauding William Ainslie of his wife's legacy.

To explain the foregoing, it is necessary to inform the reader that this Robert Fergusson was the son of Colonel Fergusson's half-brother. In Colonel Fergusson's will, it was provided, that, should his daughter Grace die before she came of age, or die intestate, leaving no issue, the estate should devolve to his half-nephew. This young man became

wild and dissipated ; and now, when he is introduced to the reader, he is occupationless, and subsisting, as best he may, on an annuity of fifty pounds left him by his father. He had got a good education, and studied for the law, but grew tired of such dry work. One of his fellow law-students was Daniel Hooker, who married his only sister, and carried her away to Broomfield, where he commenced business. In less than one year, however, she died ; but the brothers-in-law had kept up a regular intimacy, and, on more than one occasion, had been successful in accomplishing certain nefarious schemes which the wily lawyer had devised.

The best thing about Bob Fergusson was his contempt for hypocrisy. He neither tried nor desired to pass himself off for a better man than he was ; and, consequently, every one who knew him at all was aware of his want of principle and loose way of life. Generally speaking, he was heartless and selfish ; yet, in the abstract, he was generous and good-natured. Under proper training, he might have been a very different character ; but being early left to his own guidance, he never left off sowing his wild oats. Hence the alacrity with which he entered into Hooker's views regarding the suppression of Grace Fergusson's will.

But though a match for the lawyer in cleverness and clear-sightedness, he was no match for him in cunning. He well knew that his brother-in-law was deceitful in the extreme ; but, frank and open himself, he could not personally realize it so as to circumvent him. We have just seen that he got beyond Hooker in the matter of the *compensation* sum ; but the latter had already conceived a plan for *bleeding* him much more copiously, and, if the truth must be told, it was to get it executed that he hastened from Edinburgh.

On the evening of the same day, if we take a peep into his office, we shall see him writing very busily at his desk. He is evidently copying some document, for a large sheet of parchment, which has been folded, lies before him, on which he looks every now and then, and again writes.

In a short time the door of the inner room in which he sat was opened, and a tall, rough-looking fellow entered.

"Good evening, Joe," said the lawyer, looking up for a moment. "Be good enough to take a seat. I shall speak to you presently."

The new comer did as he was desired. He sat down on one of the high stools on the opposite side of the desk, folded his arms across his chest, and looked keenly at Hooker, who continued at his task. While the one writes, and the other waits, let us describe the appearance, and from that, in some degree, the character of the individual whom the lawyer had called Joe.

He was a strong, firmly built man, in the prime of life, with bushy red whiskers, and a profusion of uncombed red hair. His eye was neither very large nor very small, but intelligent. The expression on his face was a shrewd and knowing one. His natural air was evidently easy and careless, but, at present, it was partially constrained, as if from fear. To look at him, one would think he was a reckless, unsettled being, who knew well enough what he was about, yet was willing to become a tool or accomplice of any designing knave, or in any desperate enterprise.

Hooker at length finished his work, and, looking up, found Joe's keen observing eyes fixed on his face. The lawyer did not exactly like the look. It betokened more intelligence than he deemed desirable.

"You remember signing a paper here not long ago?" said the lawyer to his visitor.

"Perfectly well," answered Joe. "It was a will I guess?"

Hooker looked annoyed. He did not expect that the man he intended to make his instrument was so shrewd. He saw, at a glance, he would have to trust him further than he intended.

"And whose will do you suppose it was?"

"Why, Mrs Ainslie's, to be sure. Didn't I see her sign it?"

"Oh! of course; I forgot that. But everything that is signed and witnessed is not a will."

"That may be," returned Joe; "but this was a will at any rate, for I heard it read."

"The devil you did!" exclaimed Hooker, sitting bolt upright on his stool, and regarding his visitor with a look of dissatisfied astonishment.

"How could that be?" he continued.

"Why, easily enough," answered the other. "When the lady came in, you sent me to the outer office; but the door being ajar, and every thing quiet, I heard you read it over after you had written it."

"Then you know what was in it?"

"I do."

"Hum——! And have you mentioned it to any one?"

"I have not. You requested me, and so did the lady, if you remember, to say nothing about it; and I flatter myself Joe Stewart is the man to keep his word."

"That is well," resumed the lawyer, and mused for some moments, as if reflecting on the course to be adopted. At last he said, looking stedfastly at Joe—"Can I trust you?"



"Hooker sat bolt upright on his stool, and regarded his visitor with a look of dissatisfied astonishment."—Page 176.

The week following, Bob Fergusson took possession of the Grange, and William Ainslie returned once more to Broomfield Park. According to promise, the new laird sent for his brother-in-law, put a thousand-pound bill into his hand, and in return received the *false* will, which he immediately destroyed, thinking that all traces of the fraudulent transaction were thereby annihilated.

CHAPTER XV.

A BUSINESS TRANSACTION.

THE death of his son's wife was a terrible blow to Sir William Ainslie. Though William had at length consented to consummate his dearly-cherished plans, death had stepped in at the very hour of his triumph, and hopelessly frustrated them. Scarcely had the Grange received an Ainslie for its master, ere it passed away into other hands, and with it all hope of that county preponderance which had been the dream of the baronet's life. Bitterly did he regard that stroke of Providence which fell so severely on his worldly plans, and laid them ruthlessly in the dust. From the moment that the intelligence of Grace's death reached Broomfield Park he became moody and sullen ; and the arrival at the Grange of Robert Fergusson, the heir-at-law, to take possession of the estate, did not by any means allay his vexation.

To add to these numerous misfortunes, the position of his son with regard to Jessie Melville was another fruitful source of annoyance. Immediately after he returned with Lady Ainslie to Broomfield Park, on the day when he encountered Jessie on the stairs, he drew from his wife the whole history of the sacrifice which the young folks had made. She thought it best to lay the whole matter before him, since the discovery of Jessie's presence at the Grange

would otherwise have appeared to him singular and suspicious. She thought, too, that the knowledge of the noble deed would create in his heart favourable thoughts of the young girl, and cause him to look upon her not only without displeasure, but with admiration.

Possibly Lady Ainslie's idea might have been verified had Grace lived, for Sir William would then have judged the matter impartially, and his really generous mind must have eventually appreciated the heroic, self-denying deed, and led him to admire and respect the doer of it. But as it now was, the baronet's knowledge of the affair was most unfortunate. That which had before puzzled him in William's conduct was now amply explained, and he felt that nothing could now prevent the marriage—a marriage against which his proud spirit rebelled as much as ever. Since he had seen Jessie, and been struck with her unaccountable resemblance to Lady Ainslie, he felt how dangerous a girl of her appearance was to a susceptible heart. And then he had William's own word for believing that their mutual love was as strong as ever; and now that the only barrier which they themselves considered stood in the way of their union was removed, he saw at once that no remonstrance of his would prevent it.

And yet the more he thought of it, the more distasteful and undesirable did such a marriage appear. Every feeling of his aristocratic soul rose up against it; and the result was that he resolved, by some plan or other, to render it impossible. But what plan could he adopt? This point he could not resolve to his satisfaction, even after many days of cogitation. Not that any moral difficulty stood in his way. So determined was he to prevent the marriage, that he was prepared to go the length of *crime* to secure his

object; but not being very fertile at concocting a plan, he was unable to fix upon anything feasible. In this strait, however, he bethought him of Daniel Hooker, the lawyer. Hooker, he thought, was just a person to counsel and assist him. He thought he could trust him, for he had already managed several of his affairs, and found him faithful to his interests; besides, he had noticed his inordinate love of gain, and rightly imagined that, for a strong pecuniary consideration, he would be ready to further his views. So one afternoon, after having spent the whole of the morning in his room, brooding over the subject, he walked down to the village, and entered Hooker's inner office, to the terror of the knavish lawyer, who dreaded that some knowledge of the will had transpired. He was, however, set at rest on this point, and listened with much deference and attention to the baronet's story.

The lawyer was, as we have said, a sharp man. He, therefore, in a few moments, comprehended the matter, and knew exactly what Sir William desired. After the baronet had done, he sat for a little silently musing, then said—"You wish the girl out of the way, Sir William?"

"That is my desire," returned the baronet.

"It is a dangerous affair to enter upon," resumed the lawyer.

"I am perfectly aware of that," answered Sir William, "and am, therefore, willing to reward well, him who performs it."

"In these days of railways and electric telegraphs, it is almost impossible to succeed in such a ticklish undertaking. Where is the girl now?"

"In Edinburgh. She is a governess in my sister's household."

"Hum!" mused the lawyer; "that is at least fortunate. The chance of success is much greater in a large town like Edinburgh than in the country."

"What plan would you propose to follow?" inquired the baronet, earnestly.

"I can hardly yet say, Sir William," answered Hooker. "I confess the glimmerings of a project have seized my mind, but I must have time for consideration. You agree, however, to place the matter in my hands?"

"I do, provided that you promise the most inviolable secrecy."

"You may confidently depend upon me. It will be as much for my interest as yours that a perfect concealment of the business be effected, since the discovery of it would be a very ugly matter for me. You likewise authorize me to count upon liberal cash supplies, if necessary?"

"I have already expressed myself clearly on this head. The service being an important one, I am ready to pay well for it."

"In that case, Sir William, I think the thing may be done; only, at present, I cannot explain how. To-morrow, if convenient, I shall wait upon you at the Hall, and acquaint you with my plan."

"Don't be beyond that, then," said the baronet; "for I confess I am anxious to know what way you intend to proceed."

So saying, Sir William departed, being bowed out of the office by the obsequious lawyer. No sooner was he gone, than Hooker re-entered his inner room, shut the door, and began chuckling and rubbing his hands with great satisfaction.

"This is a capital spec.," he muttered to himself. "If

I can but manage my cards, I may here play a most lucrative game. Let me see. What o'clock is it? Half-past seven. Ay, I shall go to work immediately."

He rung a small hand-bell, and a boy appeared from the outer office.

"Peter, you know where Joe Stewart lives?"

"Yes, sir; on the edge of the Common," answered the lad, smartly.

"Just run along, and tell him I wish to see him directly."

"Yes, sir," said the boy, and off he set with brisk alacrity, glad, no doubt, to get a scamper in the open air, under God's blue sky, where every living thing rejoices.

In a quarter of an hour Joe entered Hooker's presence, with all the ease and familiarity which association in crime ever imparts. Joe's was a free and easy nature at any rate, and in almost all situations he was cool and collected. Before we go any further, it may be as well to tell the reader something about Joe, since he is destined to bear a prominent part henceforth in the incidents of this story.

His parents kept the principal gate, leading to a gentleman's mansion. The gentleman's name we will not give, nor the name of his estate. He had one son—only one—the same age as Joe. When they were boys they were inseparable companions—in fact, Joe was more about the mansion-house than the lodge. The young gentleman being weakly, he was educated at home, and Joe got lessons along with him to bear him company. His parents expected that the great folks would get their son into a situation suitable to the tastes they had given the boy; but when the youths were sixteen years of age the family removed to London, and Joe went back to the lodge. He had not learned to work, and his occupation at the Hall gave him no taste for

it; so he roamed idly about, a burden to his parents. In process of time these parents died, and Joe was forced to do something; for, although he could not work, he experienced all those wants which render work necessary—that is to say, he required food, clothing, and housing like other people. What, then, did Joe do? Why, just what a great many in a similar situation do—he took to poaching, and other things which the law of the land say is improper; in fact, he depended for his subsistence on fishing, hunting, and other things which did not require regular or severe work. Now, it may be easily supposed that the life Joe led was not particularly favourable for his moral nature. Whatever might have been the natural excellence of his disposition, such loose, lawless habits were sure to blast it, and accordingly they did. Joe was decidedly clever, but had no great respect for principle; and was willing, at any time, to engage in enterprises which, to say the least of them, were illegal and criminal, if thereby he might make a little money without having to toil for it.

The gentleman whose culpable conduct placed Joe in this idle, aimless position, learning that the young lad had been poaching on his grounds, wanted to mend matters by sending him to jail, whereby, assuredly, he would have *finished* his education as well as commenced it; but Joe, being warned of what was preparing for him, took leg-bail for his honesty, and decamped. He spent the next few years in Edinburgh, not much to his profit; but finding in time that the city, large as it was, was too small for him, and got too hot to hold him, he removed once more to the country, and got into a lonely cottage by himself, on the border of Broomfield Common. Here he plied his old trade of poaching, and was like to be bothered by Sir William

Ainslie, whose hares and pheasants he was making rather free with. Having reason to suppose that the baronet had given instructions to Lawyer Hooker to proceed against him, he was in that worthy's office, trying to persuade him to refrain, when young Mrs Ainslie came to get her will made, and he had the good fortune to become one of the witnesses.

Daniel Hooker—sharp Daniel—marked the man, and saw he might prove useful. He therefore managed to keep the fangs of the law from fastening on him, yet, at the same time, kept its jaws continually open within an inch of his throat, the better to render him obedient and pliable. For a time, therefore, Joe's natural, cool, careless manner was disturbed in the presence of Lawyer Hooker, but this soon passed away. The matter of the new will, by which Daniel "did" Bob Fergusson, gave him a pull upon Hooker, and he was no longer afraid of him. The moment Hooker made him art and part in the nefarious business, he lost his hold of him, and in return placed himself in *his* power. Hence we find him entering the lawyer's office with his usual coolness and freedom of manner.

Before the conference opened between the two worthies, a client came in on important business, and Joe was despatched to the outer office to wait there. He sat down near the door, in the hope that he might again "hear of something to his advantage;" but Daniel came and shut the thick door, through which no sounds could now come. Joe had, therefore, to content himself with looking about him, since he had nothing better to do; and this great feat he could accomplish without observation, for no one happened to be in the outer office but himself at the time. Peter had not yet got his open-air scamper over; he was evidently in no hurry to return to his high stool.

As Joe sat casting his eyes from one corner to another, a bright thought struck him. He pulled a bit of soft putty from his pocket, and took an exact impression of the locks in the outer and inner doors.

"This may be useful," he muttered to himself, as he examined the forms into which the pliable stuff had been moulded. "I should like to get hold of that will," he continued. "Gad, what a hold I should have of Hooker with such a document in my possession! I shall see if I cannot lay my hands on it some of these nights. I noticed the drawer into which he put it."

Scarcely had Joe got the pieces of putty carefully into his pocket, when Peter came in breathless, and with a fine rosy face, caught with running over the Common. Not long after, the inner door opened, and the gentleman departed, when Joe once more stepped into the sanctum, and he and the lawyer were again alone.

"Take a seat, Joe," said Hooker; "I have got something to say to you, and you may as well rest yourself while we talk."

"Not a bad advice, Mr Hooker," said Joe, swinging himself lazily on to a stool, and placing his arms in the old position across the chest. "Now I'm ready for you; what's in the wind to-night?"

"Well, Joe, you are getting lucky now," said the lawyer jocosely. "I have got scent of a nice job for you—a good living for doing almost nothing."

"The very thing for me," answered Joe, nodding complacently. "But allow me to doubt your words, Mr Hooker. This is not just the age of sinecures, except, perhaps, among government berths—*there*, I grant you, a man may have a good living for doing almost nothing; but for a poor wretch like me there is no such luck."

"Don't despair, Joe, my boy; luck often comes when least expected."

"Maybe so," returned Joe; "but I guess you have not sent for me to-night to discuss fate or destiny with me. Just come away, then, with the real thing, and leave these matters to philosophers."

Thus admonished, Hooker thought it best to be laconically explicit. "You know young Ainslie, of course?" he began.

Joe only nodded. Such a thing, he thought, was not worth replying to in words.

"He loves a young girl about Edinburgh. As she is poor, and of mean birth, Sir William is furious against it. He sees, however, that the son is determined, and wants the girl removed out of his way."

"O, he wants to provide her with a husband, does he?" said Joe, composedly.

"I'm afraid that plan won't answer," replied the lawyer. "The girl is as high-minded as she is poor, and would run shy; besides, she loves Ainslie to distraction, and would not consent to marry another man. The baronet's object will be accomplished if she is disposed of in any way."

"And do you call that nothing?" answered Joe, with a sneer. "Why, it's a hanging or banishment affair at the very least."

"O, not at all," said Hooker; "we would not propose anything like murder."

"Murder!" exclaimed Joe, starting from his seat, and for once fairly roused. "No, I should think you did not," he continued, in a calmer tone; "at least, I should not advise you to come with such a proposal to me. I'm bad enough, but not *yet* ready to become a hired assassin."

"I tell you such a thing was never in our thoughts," said Daniel; "we only want to keep her in seclusion, under the charge of a faithful individual—yourself, for instance."

"I see; and should a discovery be made?"

"Well, of course, that would be awkward; but I would do my best to clear you."

"And what does the baronet propose to offer for such a perilous service?"

"Two hundred a-year; a hundred and fifty for yourself, and fifty for the girl's support."

"It is a good offer—a tempting offer; and I would not care to risk it," said Joe, after a pause, during which he had been reflecting deeply.

"You had better make it a city business," suggested the lawyer. "It could be done more quietly, and with less risk of discovery, in Edinburgh than in the country."

"That's just what I mean to do," returned Joe. "I know of a snug place in one of the High Street closes, where the thing could be done with secrecy."

"Of course, it will be for your interest to keep the girl in health," said Hooker. "Should anything come over her, your situation would slip from you, you know."

"I understand," replied Stewart; "and, for the sake of all parties, she must not be suffered to have communication with any one but myself, and a certain old woman whom I have in my eye for her attendant."

"Of course not; it would spoil all to let her speak to any one but those engaged in our interest."

"Then I undertake the business," said Joe, rising. "Any time specified?"

"Why, no; only the sooner the better."

"What is the girl's name, and where does she live?"

"She is called Jessie Melville, and is governess with Mrs Fergusson, No. — Heriot Row."

"Jessie Melville, Mrs Fergusson's, No. — Heriot Row," muttered Joe slowly, as he noted down the address on a slip of paper. Then looking quietly up, he said, "This day week I will be here to report progress."

"Very good," returned Hooker; "I shall acquaint Sir William with the progress already made."

"I must, however, have a little cash in the meantime, said Joe."

"How much?"

"Fifty pounds."

"Here is the money. Be good enough to give me a receipt for it."

Joe wrote the receipt, pocketed the cash, and departed. Hooker, too, left the office, and took his way to the Hall, to inform Sir William of the arrangement that had been made. And the sum that the worthy lawyer exacted of the worthy baronet, for the accomplishment of the villanous business, was five hundred per annum.

Sir William was, however, much relieved. He had the prospect of getting Jessie out of William's way, and already looked forward hopefully to his son's marriage with the unin-
tellectual but very rich Lady Mary Hall, the only daughter of Sir Alexander Hall of Nethan Bank.

Poor, foolish, debased Sir William Ainslie.

CHAPTER XVI.

JESSIE'S CAPTURE.

WE have seen how the death of Grace Fergusson affected Sir William Ainslie—but perhaps it is a more interesting question to ask how it affected Jessie and William. For days after the solemn event, neither the one nor the other thought of how it bore on their relation to each other. The grief, consequent on such an affecting occurrence, excluded from their minds much of what the marriage had interrupted. But this could not last long. By degrees former recollections came rushing in, and the prospects of the future opened up before them. Ainslie could now rejoice in the sacrifice that had been made, since he could again call Jessie his, and remember that he had done his duty. Bright and glorious as the future seemed ere the engagement was broken off, it had now assumed even a more delightful appearance. The occurrence of the last few weeks, torturing and trying as it was at the time, now became an element in the cup of happiness. It is ever so. Duty done is eventually good gained. Sooner or later every action bears its legitimate fruit. If evil, its inherent bitterness is in due time experienced; and, if good, its gracious results are finally manifested. Nor could it be otherwise under the moral government of such a being as we believe the God of heaven to be. If He is that just and beneficent Ruler which Christendom rejoices to

believe He is, and which that old but venerated Book, written many hundreds of years ago in Palestine, declares Him to be, virtue and generosity must in due time bring their reward. A Father, and not a fiend, being at the helm of the universe, the beauty of sacrifice and its blessed operation must in due time shine forth. This is our strong, unwavering faith, and a close observation of what is passing around us will ever tend to justify it.

William Ainslie, then, felt the satisfying influence of the noble duty he had performed. But, O! if *he* was thus rewarded, what must Jessie have been?—she who had conceived the heroic deed, and wrought so self-denyingly to get it accomplished. In the inscrutable providence of Heaven, it was decreed that the time of separation between the lovers was not, as they anticipated, a life-long matter, nor even long continued. Scarcely had the sacrifice been completed, ere the occasion for it was withdrawn. But it had been done—literally, effectually done. No divine voice had come forth from the clouds to forbid its utter and absolute consummation. No ram was found caught in the thicket to become a substitution. No, the awful ordeal had been rigorously endured; and now that the time of reward had come, how sweet and comforting the thoughts of the principal sacrificing one!

No communication had, however, taken place between the two since they separated by the corpse of the dead Grace. Lady Ainslie, knowing Jessie's true position, had got her back to Edinburgh, even before the funeral of her friend, so that she and William had not met again. But even if they had, no word of a personal kind would have passed between them. William, with his high, pure soul, would never have talked of love, even to Jessie, while his wife was not yet cold in her shroud. It mattered not how

peculiar their circumstances—she *was* his wife by whatever means, and the rights of the relationship must be respected. Ainslie loved Jessie as dearly as ever, and ardently longed to renew the engagement when the fitting time came; but ~~still~~ that, he felt it would be dishonouring to both to enter, even most remotely, on the subject.

Jessie, on her part, understood and appreciated his conduct. Though no communication had been received from him, she intuitively felt that he would return to her and renew the engagement. On this point she had no doubt whatever. She knew his character and his heart too well to think otherwise; and so, waiting patiently, because waiting in confidence, she continued to tend carefully the little orphans, and faithfully to fill the sphere in which she was placed.

But a dark cloud again came over the sky of life, and a course of trials and hardships was yet to be encountered by the devoted pair. The spirit of evil received permission to assail and triumph over them. Our readers know the nature of the evil nigh at hand, having been cognizant of the plot which a sinful pride had caused to be laid against them.

Autumn had now come—the glorious Autumn of 18—; and everywhere in the smiling Scottish fields the reapers were busy among the yellow corn. The joyous harvest-labour was being performed at every farm; the hearts of all, both old and young, were made to rejoice as they saw the year crowned with the Creator's goodness, and a horn of plenty pouring itself out upon the land.


But very little of this stirring happy scene was known to the dwellers in Edinburgh. A few Irishmen, perambulating at early morn or dewy dusk the High Street and the Cow-

gate, with hooks beneath their arms, was the only indication to the citizens of what was going on without—such of them, we mean, as business or dire necessity confined to the smoky city. They might, perchance, while walking in the Meadows, get a glimpse of the stooks standing in rows in the haughs of the Braid Hills; or when rambling, on Sunday afternoons, over breezy Arthur Seat, mark them dotting the far-off fertile fields of East Lothian; but little beyond this was their experience of the gladdest season of all the year.

On a bright September morning, about the hour of nine, the only human being to be seen in Heriot Row was a tall man, going slowly along with one or two door-mats over his shoulder. He did not go into any of the houses, but was evidently keeping account of the numbers as he went along; for he glanced at every door, and deliberately proceeded on his way.

When he came to No. —, he paused, and looked narrowly at the door-plate. "Ay, it's all right," he muttered; "there is the name at any rate—now, to work my way inside." Down the stairs went the tall man, and knocked at the area door. While he is waiting its opening, we may as well tell the reader that, under the elaborate disguise worn by this stalwart seller of mats, we, who, like him, "know a thing or two," recognise Joe Stewart. Need we say that the kitchen door at which he is now tapping is that of Mrs Ferguson?

It was opened by our old friend Maggie Johnstone, who, when she saw the huge form of Joe, and the articles of merchandise he carried, was about to close it again very rudely in his face. Joe divined her intention, however, and thrust his leg within the lintel, so that when the door



swung round, it came rap against his knee. The cunning fellow roared "O dear," and dropt plump down on the flags. This at once called forth Maggie's reproachful sympathy. She thought she had lamed him, and felt greatly concerned at the catastrophe. Hastily opening the door again, she came, and, bending over him, inquired if he was much hurt.

Joe moaned to perfection, and said he feared he was badly wounded, though his limb was as sound and free from pain as ever it had been.

"O what a pity!" ejaculated Maggie, in great distress. "I'm sure I didna mean to harm ye." But ye maunna lie there; ye maun come into the hoose. Can ye manage to dae that, think ye?"

"I may, with your help, my bonnie lassie," said the sly *quasi* mat-seller, and he looked meekly up in her face.

Maggie stooped down, and got hold of each arm to assist him up, a feat which she nearly effected; but just as she thought him on his feet, down he went again, with another well-acted groan.

The poor girl was now nearly crying with alarm. "Sarah," she exclaimed, along the passage, "come and help me in wi' this man."

Out came the wondering Sarah; and when she saw the huge fellow lying helplessly in the area, and Maggie holding him, she could only stand still in amazement.

"What's the matter wi' the man, Maggie?" she asked.

"O, puir fallow, I steekit the door i' his face, and jammed his leg atween it and the cheeks," sobbed Maggie in her terror. "Be quick," she continued, "and help me in wi' him intil the hoose."

Thus adjured, Sarah posted hersel at the other side of Joe, and got him once more on his legs. Then the three

staggered along the passage, and made their way into the kitchen, where Joe was at length comfortably seated by the fire, and continued to mimic the expression of a man in mortal agony.

"Could you give me a cup of water?" he faintly murmured.

"Ay, that we can, and pit a drap whisky in it tae," said Sarah, who bustled away to get the mixture in question; while Maggie—the luckless Maggie—who had wrought all the mischief, lingered by the chair in which he sat, inquiring every moment if his leg was any better.

Joe would not allow that it was till he had swallowed a tumbler, one-half of which was composed of the best Glenlivet; but after that he thought it felt scarcely so dreadful.

"It's jist a dirl on the bane," said Sarah, "and there can be naething waur at the time; but it sune gangs awa. I wager in a quarter o' an hour ye'll hardly find it."

"I'm shure I wus ye may be richt," responded Maggie. "This will learn me no to shut the door in onybody's face again. Is't settlin onything now, lad, think ye?"

"Well, I dare say it is scarcely so painful," answered Joe, handling the knee very tenderly, and fuffing every time he touched it.

"Guidness me! I hope nane o' the sma' banes are broken," sighed Maggie anxiously, as he winced so desperately under the touch of his own hand.

Joe, after feeling it all round, gave it as his opinion that none of the bones were injured, and begged Maggie to compose herself, as he felt the pain gradually going away. Thus comforted, the girl's heart beat less wildly, and Sarah, who was a merry-hearted lass, as all kind, good-natured people are, began to laugh at the adventure.

"But will you not buy a mat from me?" asked Joe, who thought it as well to keep up his commercial character.

"Weel, I dinna think we need ony," returned Maggie, who was the housemaid. "The only ane that's sair aff is the ane that lies at Miss Jessie's room-door, and I ken nae odds on't for a lang time, for she's no a ane to waste it."

"Miss Jessie! I am fond of that name, it is so pretty," said Joe. "I imagine every one that is called Jessie must be bonny, and good, and kind. Is the Miss Jessie you speak of a nice young lady?"

"O yes," exclaimed Maggie, glad to speak in praise of the young governess; "everybody likes her in the hoose, frae the mistress to Betty Mack that comes to help us to wash every fortnight."

"Is she the only daughter?" inquired Joe, carelessly.

"Daughter! she's nae daughter ava," answered Maggie, "but the governess to Mrs Fergusson's daughter's bairns, the twa little orphan twinnies."

"I wonder such a sweet girl, as you say she is, is not married; but perhaps she is not so pretty as she is good, or perhaps she is too young?"

"Na, she's no owre young, and she's bonny enugh tae; but I dinna think she has ony sweethearts. She hardly ever gangs oot, ye see, and we keep little company here; and forbie, she's been very dowie since young Mrs Ainslie's death. She hasna been oot owre the door for weeks, though she's gaun the nicht—and to a waddin tae."

Joe's eye twinkled strangely at this information, yet he did not wish to show the interest he felt in the conversation.

"I wonder she is going to a marriage," he said, with assumed indifference, "when she is so distressed about a recent death."

"And neither wad she hae gane," answered his informant, "but the bride is an auld acquaintance o' hers, and she had promised lang syne to be at her waddin. But I'se warrant ye she'll no stay late, and it's no likely she'll be oot again in a hurry."

"Not if I can help it," muttered Joe to himself. Then he endeavoured to discover in what part of the town the ceremony was to be performed, but was here unsuccessful, as neither of the girls knew. He had, however, gained his object, and indeed more than he anticipated; and after a little more dallying on unimportant matters, he departed, feeling, as he said, that his knee was now greatly better. Sarah gave him another tumbler of her reviving cordial, and Maggie told him to ca' back soon, and maybe they wad buy a mat for Miss Jessie's door.

Away hirpled Joe, limping till he got to the Hanover Street turning, but after that, marching up the hill with his usual firm tread, congratulating himself all the way at having succeeded so admirably in getting such a speedy chance thrown in his way of fulfilling the mission he had undertaken; for he had resolved to seize Jessie that very night, since he might not have another chance for long, and he was now hurrying along to get his plans and preparations perfected.

And so, on the evening of this Friday, Richard Sandilands and Mary Richardson were to be married, and to this festivity it was that Jessie was going. She hesitated long in consenting to be present so soon after Grace's death; but Mary would not be said nay—positively asserting that unless Jessie was there, she would not be married at all. Poor Richard's rueful and appealing look, when this decision of his bride was announced, was more than Jessie's kind heart could resist, and she at length promised to be present.

though not to act as bridesmaid, an office which Mary would fain have thrust upon her.

Well, the Friday—the eventful Friday—big with the fate of these two lovers, had arrived, and its hours were hurrying on towards seven, when the momentous knot was to be tied. This day of the week is generally the working-man's wedding-day. In the higher ranks, there does not seem to be any day particularly selected; but among the labouring population, Friday is almost invariably chosen, and the choice is a wise and prudent one. On such an occasion, a working-man cannot afford to waste much time; yet from its nature, it is desirable to have a holiday or two to begin the new sphere of life with. This can be best gained towards the end of the week—the ceremony being performed on the Friday night, the marriage party have the Saturday to enjoy themselves. On the Sabbath, the young couple “make their appearance” at the kirk, and on the following morning the new-made husband repairs to his work, having lost not more than two days. There is nothing like a wedding-tour for the artisan. The honeymoon is spent where it ought to be—at home; and herein, at least, do limited means induce a commendable practice. We have often been struck by the absurdness of the custom prevailing among the upper ranks, of leaving the altar for a six weeks' travel. The simple, yet sublime ceremony performed there, calls a new home into existence, and why should the first days of matrimony be spent abroad? Rather should the newly-wedded pair hasten to enter that domestic circle which their union is intended to create—rather should the first, the very first hours of wedded life, be devoted to the rearing of the altar, and the fencing of the fireside, that hallowed spot where family joys so largely cluster. In our opinion, a jaunt, or a journey of sight-seeing,

is no fit preparation for, or introduction to, the duties of the wedded state. There can be no enjoyment so pure and exquisite as that of an amiable, loving pair, when they first find themselves under the roof that is to shelter them. It is in their home that their chief happiness is to be experienced, and why should they, ere taking possession of it, wander away to the ends of the earth?

But we are digressing. At six o'clock, Jessie left Heriot Row alone, to go to the Horse Wynd, where Mary lived, and where the marriage was to take place. On emerging from the house, a tall, well-dressed man, who had been sauntering for some time on the other side, looked keenly at her, and followed her at a short distance.

"This must be the girl," he muttered to himself, as he kept his eye upon her. "And yet, if I was to seize the wrong person, what a job it would be! She answers the description exactly, however—yes, I'll follow, and risk it?"

And follow he did—as closely as he could, without being suspected either by Jessie or the persons on the street—up the Mound, down the Lawnmarket, and Blair Street, into the Cowgate, and eventually to the door of the house in the Horse Wynd to which she was going. This latter he reached as Jessie was ascending the stair. He heard her tap at a door above, he heard the door opened, and a joyous voice exclaim, "O, Jessie, hoo glad I am ye hae come! The party are a' gathered, and the minister will be here in a minute." Then the door closed, and entire silence prevailed in the stair.

"All right," chuckled the tall man at the stair foot, whom our readers have, doubtless, discovered to be Joe. "It's the girl, sure enough, and the place could not have been better though I had fixed on it myself."

We need not stop to describe the festive scene. The blushing Mary was all smiles, and looked her handsomest. The scruples about the warm weather and the want of whiskers had evidently been got over, for to-night it was extremely sultry, and Richard's face was as bare as ever. Beardless and boyish as was his face, however, he carried a warm, honest, manly heart in his bosom; and this is, after all, to be preferred to whiskers.

A few hours after the ceremony, and while the party were at the height of their enjoyment, Jessie drew Mary aside, and told her that she must be going home.

"Can ye no stop a bit langer?" inquired Mary.

"No. It is late for me; but don't let my departure break up your party. I shall just slip out without any leave-taking."

"But somebody maun gang hame wi' ye," said Mary, anxiously. "Richard will be angry if ye gang away by yersel."

"O no, no; I shall get the way quite well alone. And now, my dear Mary, let me wish you a great amount of happiness in your wedded life. You have got a good husband—make a good wife to him. Render his home attractive; don't let him forsake it for the tavern. Be true to each other, and live ever within the smile of Heaven, and you are sure to be prosperous."

The two young friends embraced each other very tenderly, and Jessie departed. It was now late and dark. The streets, even the Cowgate itself, she found deserted. A bright light, moving in the distance, showed the far-off presence of a policeman; but no other sign of human thing was there. She was only a few doors from Blair Street, when, in passing the dark mouth of a close, she felt herself

in a firm grasp, and some one pressed a handkerchief closely to her mouth. This not only prevented her from crying, but the handkerchief having been steeped in chloroform, its fumes soon rendered her powerless and unconscious. She thus, in a few moments, became an easy prey to Joe, who lifted her in his arms as if she had been a feather, and bore her rapidly up the close. About the middle he darted into a dark doorway, and groped his way up the stair with his burden. Up, up he went, passing landing after landing, till he arrived at the very top, and knocked impatiently at the door. It was opened in a moment by an elderly female, who evidently expected him, for not a word was said. Joe carried Jessie up an interior stair, into a little attic chamber, and laid her on the bed. The old woman had followed close at his heels with a light, and now gazed earnestly on the face of the unconscious captive.

"She's pretty, is she not?" asked Joe, who also gazed fixedly on Jessie's features.

"Humph!—she's well enough," answered the female, who was herself by no means handsome. "You men are all taken with good looks."

"Come, now, don't be jealous old lass," whispered Joe, slapping her good-naturedly on the shoulder. "You and I are not going to quarrel about the girl; just you watch her carefully, and be kind to her, since we are paid so handsomely for her. She'll not awake till the morning, for the dose was ducedly strong. We must then deal with her as we can."

So saying, the poacher and his companion left the room—locking the door on the outside—and descended to the lower apartment; while Jessie continued to breathe heavily and sleep profoundly under the influence of the subtle drug.

CHAPTER XVII.

PRISON LIFE AND PRISON WORK.

IT was the grey dawn of the morning when Jessie's still heavy eyelids unclosed, and her consciousness half returned. Yet, for a long time after this, she lay in a dreamy, listless, apathetic state. The influence of the chloroform was ebbing away, yet its strength was not altogether gone. Her thinking powers, as well as her physical energies, were quite benumbed; her memory glimmered but faintly, like the dawn which surrounded her, and she could neither call to mind the circumstances immediately preceding her insensibility, nor form any conception of the situation in which she was now placed. But as the morning sun came gradually up the eastern sky, and the objects of the landscape stood out one by one from the obscurity in which the darkness of night had enshrouded them, so by degrees her intellectual faculties emerged from the haze in which they lingered, and her position came point by point before her, till she recollected enough to fill her with the wildest anxiety.

The increasing light, revealing the unknown objects around her, first impressed her with the idea that some strange thing had happened her. She saw she was in a strange room—a room she had never been in before—and wondered how she came there. Then, like a flash of light-

ning, the marriage-party of the previous night came before her. She remembered leaving Mary's house alone, and being suddenly assailed in the Cowgate; of the firm grasp with which she was secured; and of the suffocating, overpowering fumes of the handkerchief that was placed upon her mouth. Here, of course, her memory had to stop, for it had been entrusted with nothing further. Of being carried up the close, and up the long stair into the room in which she now was, by a tall, fierce-looking man, she knew nothing; and she immediately became busy with conjecturing where she was, who had got her in their power, and for what purpose she had been brought hither. It was, however, all in vain. At the real state of the matter she could not guess, even remotely, though she dreaded that she was the intended victim of some evil designing ones.

Finding, however, that she could realize nothing definite by conjecture, she began to note the aspect of the room, and the state in which she actually was. It was a small attic apartment, lighted from the roof, the window being secured by exterior transverse iron bars. The furniture was neat, clean, and comfortable; the bed was hung with lilac curtains, and its covering was white as snow. Except her bonnet, shawl, and shoes, no part of her dress had been removed; but the coverlet was spread carefully over her. Instinctively she searched in her bosom for the proofs of her birth, which she had always carried there since the death of Mrs Melville, and to her joy found them quite safe. Plunder, then, had not been the object of her captors. Nothing had been removed from her person but the articles mentioned, and these lay on a chair near the bedside.

She looked at the door, which was placed at the far side of the room, and resolved to see if she could not escape by

it; but when she tried to rise, her limbs refused to act. By a strong effort, however, she left the bed, and tottered to the door. Alas! it was locked on the outside; and thus she found she was a prisoner. Glad enough was she to get back again to bed, for her limbs were no longer subject to her will, so potent and powerful had been the spirit she had inhaled.

After getting once more into bed, she began to call up the resources of her nature to her aid. It was useless, she saw, to give way to vague, undefined fears, since, if her position was desperate, she had only the more need of resolution and firmness. Whatever the situation in which she was placed, agitation and alarm would only render it worse. Let her prepare herself for what was coming, and she would thus be better able to meet and grapple with it. We dare not say she was fearless or indifferent—she was too womanly for that; but she did not lose her presence of mind, though, not knowing the nature of her case, she could not fully arm herself for defence.

Hour after hour passed away in quietness and painful anticipation, being told by two clocks, which she recognised as that of St Giles' and the Tron. By this she knew she was not far from the High Street; and the construction of her chamber informed her that she was in the top flat of the house—removed, therefore, the farther from assistance and neighbourly aid.

As she lay listening intently, she heard some one stirring below, and in a short time a foot came cautiously up the stair. The lock was turned slowly, the door opened gently, and a woman entered the apartment—the same who assisted Joe to place Jessie in bed on the previous night. She stepped forward to the bed on tiptoe, as if fearful of dis-

turbing its occupant; but when she got near enough, she saw that Jessie was awake, and her eye fixed full upon her.

"O, you are awake," said the woman, in a not unkind tone. "I thought you might be still asleep, and did not wish to rouse you."

"How and why am I here?" inquired Jessie, in a firm, collected voice, which surprised her listener, as she expected to be greeted with an outburst of grief and indignation.

"These are questions I cannot answer you," she replied, after a moment's silence; "but have a little patience, as some one will visit you after breakfast who may give you the information you desire. As this person is a male, and not a female, you will, perhaps, prefer to see him out of bed; if so, you had better rise, while I am preparing your breakfast."

This civility and delicacy somewhat assured Jessie. She therefore said, in a quiet tone, that she would leave her couch immediately. The woman then withdrew, and Jessie soon heard her rattling with dishes in the room below. She now hastened to quit the bed, and found, with joy, that her former feebleness and impotence had greatly decreased. Strength had again flowed into her frame, and with the renewed command she had acquired over her organs came an additional amount of courage and hopefulness.

Hardly had she got her dress properly adjusted, when her former visitor re-appeared with a comfortable tea breakfast, which she placed on the table, and again withdrew. Jessie could eat very little, yet she did manage to swallow some, and sat waiting eagerly for the promised visit. The voices of two people were heard conversing in low tones down stairs, and one of the speakers, Jessie was sure, was a

man ; but as the door was again locked, she could not overhear what was said.

The sounds ceased, and a heavy foot came tramp, tramp, up the wooden stair. In another moment the tall, burly form of Joe appeared in the open doorway, and he stalked slowly into the apartment. At the first glance Jessie was terrified at his huge stature and fierce red whiskers ; but a moment's inspection of his features showed her he was not so ferocious as he seemed. She could even detect a gleam of easy good nature in his eye, and the whole expression of his face showed her that he was not naturally either cruel or vindictive.

" Good morning, Miss," he muttered, somewhat gruffly ; " I hope you have had a comfortable night's rest."

Joe assumed this rough tone, for he expected to be assailed with angry reproaches, and wished to inspire his prisoner with terror in order to prevent them.

" I have indeed slept *soundly*," said Jessie, looking him steadily in the face—so steadily and fixedly that Joe had to avoid her gaze. " For this, however, I am indebted to other than natural causes, as you probably well know. May I ask if you are the individual from whom I am promised information regarding my very strange and unexpected position ? "

" I believe, Ma'am, whatever information you get will be furnished by me, but the amount you must not expect to be large. You may easily conceive that plans which require your seclusion here do not admit of being explained to you ; in fact, all that I design to tell you may be said in a few words. For the present, you must consider yourself a prisoner within this room. You will be kindly treated and carefully attended to, if you prove tractable ; but if you attempt in any way to escape, or to draw the attention of

the neighbours towards you, I may as well tell you that strict and severe measures will be immediately adopted."

"This is strange," said Jessie, who in vain sought to unravel the mystery. "You must have mistaken me for some other person, for it is impossible any one can have any interest in thus imprisoning me."

"O, no mistake about it," said Joe, bluntly. "Your name is Jessie Melville, is it not?"

"That is indeed my name."

"Then it's all right: you are the person wanted out of the way, and no other; but I must not talk here any longer. Let me advise you, however, for your own sake, not to attempt to regain liberty; for such an attempt would assuredly fail, and would cause me to do what I have no wish to do otherwise."

"Stay a moment," exclaimed Jessie, as Joe was about to leave the room. "Will you not tell me how long my imprisonment will continue?"

"I have no notion of that myself," answered Joe. "It may be a long or a short time, just as circumstances turn out. By-the-by," he continued, "if there are any books you would like, to amuse you, I will get them."

"Thank you," returned Jessie, with her sweet smile. "I would feel obliged for the last Number of *Chambers's Journal*, and a Bible."

"O, you are religious, are you?" said Joe, with a slight sneer. "Well, every one to his taste. For my part, I set little store by your parsons and churches, your prayers and chapter-readings. If such things induce people to do what your religious folks, and your great church-going folks do, I think a man is better to have nothing to do with religion. It's little mercy or kindness I have met with from those who

pretend to be such saints. No, no; Joe Stewart is not such a fool as to take up with such canting stuff. However, I'll get a Bible for you. Weddell, I take it, is the man for that sort of article.

"Thank you," again said Jessie, with another winning smile—a smile which no one could resist. It wrought upon and conquered Joe, too, as it had done all others; and as he went slowly down the stair, he muttered, "Upon my word, it is a pity to trap such a pretty girl as that. If the job was not such a paying one, I would let her go; but that will never do either—a hundred and fifty a year is not to be thrown away. No, no, I must keep out of her way; for, hang me, if I saw her often, she would be sure to get round me."

When Jessie was again left alone, she sank into a train of deep, puzzling reflection. What *could* be the meaning of it all? At whose instigation had she been thus confined, and what end could be accomplished by her imprisonment? She made her reflections very coolly, for the interview she had just had with Joe chased away the fears she had for her personal safety. She saw at once that he was not much to be feared; that her position, though unenviable, was not dangerous; and that, though she was to be deprived of liberty, every comfort compatible with such strict seclusion would be afforded her. Made easy thus in her mind, she could think calmly and deliberately of the matter, and strive to discover the reason of her capture. For a long time she was hopelessly bewildered; but at length the form of Sir William Ainslie, her father, came before her. In a moment she caught at the truth. He it was who had thus immured her, to be out of William's reach. Not even the sacrifice *made by William* in marrying Grace could then bring the

baronet to consent to their union—a union which was again rendered possible by Grace's death—and had taken this method of preventing it.

Here, then, the aspect of affairs had entirely changed; and might not *her* plans have to be changed too? She knew full well that, however anxious Sir William might be to have his son married again into an aristocratic family, that son would never consent; and she guessed that, unyielding as the old man was, her liberty would never be granted. Was it not her duty, then, in these circumstances, to reveal her birth? It was, doubtless, different from her original intention; but was she not warranted, in the strange alteration of affairs, thus to act?

She sat a long time pondering on this matter. At last she mentally exclaimed—"Before I resolve any way, I must be better assured of the truth of my suspicions. I shall tax this man—this Joe Stewart, as he calls himself—with it suddenly, and keep my eye firmly on his countenance. I am certain that by this means I shall know if I am correct."

Not long after this, she heard Joe's foot on the stair, and in he came, with the *Journal* and a Bible in his hand.

"Here are your books, Miss," he said, as he laid them down on the table. He was about to retire, when the smile again arrested him, and he was spell-bound. Jessie stepped forward to examine the Bible, which was elegantly bound, and very neat in its appearance.

"Hope it pleases you," said Joe, kindly, as he lingered at the opposite side of the table, anxious for an approving word.

"It is really very beautiful," said Jessie, gravely, yet with a pleased look, which rewarded Joe for his trouble. "I should like to read some of it to you when you have time."

"Read it to me!" exclaimed Joe, with a good-humoured laugh.

"Yes, I think you would find it interesting. Here, for instance, is a sentence which is very applicable to you at the present time—'Be sure your sin will find you out.'"

Joe's face reddened, and he endeavoured to conceal his emotion by another laugh, but Jessie saw he was moved; then, shutting the book, she looked steadily in his face, and said, abruptly, "So you are Sir William Ainslie's agent?"

"Sir William Ainslie's agent!" repeated Joe, completely off his guard; "who told you that?"

"I guessed it," she replied, "and I see I am right."

"What a fool I am to be caught by a girl," he muttered, but his words were audible. "Well, since you have guessed so much," he continued, aloud, "perhaps you have an idea of the object he has in view?"

"I believe I have," said Jessie, with a blush, which, however, yielded to her rushing thoughts. "But are you not afraid to do such a desperate deed as this? You must be aware that its discovery will lead to most serious consequences as regards yourself."

"Of course I am aware of that," said Joe, with his old free and easy expression. "But do you suppose I would undertake the job without being well paid for it, or making up my mind to insure concealment at all hazards. The fact to which you have just alluded must make a clear-headed lady, such as I see you are, aware that I will take every step to prevent you from regaining your liberty."

"Do you mean this as a threat?" inquired Jessie, with a faint smile.

"No; only as a warning," returned Joe, significantly; yet the expression of his countenance was not very fierce.

and his prisoner again saw that his nature was not harsh or vindictive.

"But do you not fear the vengeance of a higher than man?" she asked, hoping to make an impression upon him in this way.

"What, you want to come over me with your religion, do you?" he rejoined, with a careless laugh. "No, no; I told you already that such notions as these had no power over me. They may do well enough to frighten silly men and weak women; but I am too old and knowing a bird to be caught by such chaff;" saying which, he left the room, with another loud laugh.

Jessie shuddered at such a confession of infidelity. She had often heard that there were men in the world who disbelieved the Bible, and laughed at religion, but had never come in contact with any such; and being herself full of faith and undoubting trust, she was shocked as well as saddened by Joe's utter scepticism. She saw that any appeals to his moral nature would be made in vain; and so long as her imprisonment yielded him a competency, she had no chance of being released. Joe, she saw, had undoubtedly many good elements in his nature, which, if she could but get into play, might induce him to free her from the wrong which was being done to her; but these had been so long in fallow, while the baser parts of his nature were regularly cultivated, that it would require a terrible effort and a persevering labour to gain the object. Religion he now laughed at; but Joe was not naturally irreligious. The oppression he had suffered at the hands of those who professed to be Christians, had given him that distaste for Christianity which he now scrupled not to avow. But Joe Stewart was like a great many. He judged of religion

solely by its pretended followers, never dreaming that it was by their conduct grossly misrepresented and vilified. Of the Bible he knew little or nothing, beyond the fact that it was the book which was said to guide the practice of "the great folks;" and that was sufficient to set him strongly against it. In this way the Bible has been thousands of times injured, and that sublime religion which it reveals rejected. Would men but refuse to take the Gospel at second hand, and carefully examine its own pages, we are convinced that many who are now sceptics would gladly embrace its doctrines, and believe with joy its "glad tidings," which suit so truly every human heart.

As Jessie Melville sat in her lonely prison-chamber, thinking of the course she should adopt, two lines of conduct stretched themselves out before her—either to reveal her birth, or labour to effect a reformation on Joe's character, to fill him with better thoughts of religion, and rouse those noble, generous feelings, which she saw slumbering in his heart. If she could accomplish this latter, she knew that even the price he was paid for his services as her jailer would no longer be a consideration great enough in his eyes to induce him to continue to be art and part in the injustice. Either way, then, she might put an end to the painful situation. The question for her to settle was, By which of the two methods to act? Selfish and personal considerations, no doubt, pointed to an immediate revelation of her birth. By this means, she would at once escape from bondage, and be received into the bosoms of many welcoming friends. Even the stern Sir William Ainslie would then fold her to his heart, and atone with tears for all his past injustice. But we have seen, long ere this, that Jessie was one of the most unselfish girls alive, and

that, when two paths lay before her, she invariably chose that which was lined with duty, however steep, rugged, or arduous it might be.

The original consideration which caused her to resolve to conceal her birth till after her marriage with William, was as strong and sacred as ever. It might injure him she knew not how vitally, and from such a consequence as this she shrank resolutely back. Then, by adopting the other line of conduct, she might perform a mighty and a glorious work. She would, if successful, rescue a soul from the dark region of infidelity, and restore to usefulness one who had long wandered in reckless and forbidden ways. Her heart literally thrilled with joy as she contemplated such a splendid achievement. Here was another noble duty placed before her, attended, no doubt, with trial and sacrifice, but this latter was nothing to the importance of the work. She did not deliberate long. Gladly, nay, eagerly, did she devote herself to Joe's conversion; and to comfort and cheer her heart in entering on the "work and labour of love," she opened the Bible which lay before her, and there read—

"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

And again,—

"They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever."

Then she kneeled down and prayed for the blessing of her Heavenly Father in carrying out her endeavour, and solicited the influences of the good Spirit, without which all her efforts would be in vain.

Can we doubt that her prayer was heard and answered?

And yet for a time no opportunity came. After the first day or two, Joe came little near her, and only for a few moments. The female attended carefully to all her wants, but she was very reserved, and never familiarly conversed with her. She began to despair of attaining her object, as week after week passed away; but Providence, who has many ways of working, placed at length the opportunity within her reach, and soon we shall see how the weak, yet God-supported girl, conquered the wild, thoughtless, yet generous nature of the erring man.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ROBBERY.

ONE dark, boisterous night, "when could November's surly blast laid fields and forests bare," a muffled figure, scarcely discernible through the mirk, passed up the little village of Broomfield, when most, if not all, of its inhabitants were sunk in slumber. It was the figure of a man—a tall man—in short, the figure of Joe Stewart. He paused opposite Daniel Hooker's office, and looked cautiously about him. Nothing human but himself was visible. The wind howled mournfully among the trees of the plantation at the end of the village, and gust after gust smote fiercely on the chimneys and gables of the houses. The sky above was covered by black, stormy clouds; no moon was there to relieve in any measure the darkness; and the pale rays of the stars could not penetrate the gloom.

Joe lingered a few moments at the office door, and listened intently; he then walked slowly to the extreme verge of the village, and satisfied himself that no one was stirring. Not a glimmer was to be seen from any of the windows; not a footfall was heard on the long street in the pauses of the blast; not a living thing, or a sign of wakefulness, was to be seen anywhere. In a moment or two, Joe was again stationary at the lawyer's office. He cautiously approached the door, and applied a well-oiled key to the lock. Yet did

he not offer to turn it, for at the moment the wind had lulled, and comparative silence prevailed. Presently, however, he heard the first march of another gust crushing together the branches of the elms, and he knew that it would soon be thundering down the street. In a moment it came whirling and eddying along, and while yet it was spending its fierceness against the windows, and raging loudly on the walls and roofs, he executed the office of *turn-key*. The lock shot back, but even he himself heard no sound. Quickly he entered, and carefully closed and locked the door on the inside. Then he groped his way through the front office to the opposite door, which he found locked also. He took another key from his pocket which fitted the lock exactly, but this time a harsh sound was emitted, which Joe feared would alarm Hooker, who, he knew, slept in one of the rooms above.

He waited a while without proceeding further; but hearing nothing, he pushed open the door, and entered; then, after pausing a little, as if deliberating, he locked it also in the inside, and pocketed the key. He now drew a dark lantern from his bosom, and undid the slide, when the various objects in the room became visible.

"Thus far I have got safely," muttered Joe to himself; "now to get hold of the will, and then to be off."

He proceeded to the drawer in which he had seen Hooker deposit the document. It was firmly fastened, as he expected; but he pulled out a large bunch of false keys, and applied them one after another. It was in vain, however—none would open the drawer.

"This is unfortunate," he again muttered. "I don't want to break it open if I can help it. What is that? A bunch of keys!" he continued, as his eye fell on one of the

desks. For once the lawyer had left them lying, and possibly he had never before been so forgetful. Joe eagerly clutched at them, and, after one or two ineffectual trials, got one which suited the drawer. He opened it, and began to rummage among the papers it contained, taking care, however, not to disarrange any.

In a recess, below a great many packages, he came upon Grace Fergusson's will—the object of his search. He grasped it with joyful eagerness, and deposited it carefully in the breast pocket of his ample overcoat, locked the drawer, replaced the keys on the desk, and prepared to quit the office.

He was about to open the door of the inner room, when he thought he heard a noise at no great distance. He listened breathlessly, and found he was not mistaken. The sound of some one approaching distinctly reached his ear, and, glancing round, he discovered another door, leading, doubtless, to the lawyer's furnished rooms above. It was from this direction that the noise came; and as it was heard nearer and nearer, he had no doubt it was Hooker himself coming to his sanctum for some purpose or other.

For a moment he was undecided what to do, but looking beyond the fire-place, he saw a sort of sofa standing along by the wall, the front covering of which hung down to the ground. Quick as thought he extinguished his lantern, and crept noiselessly beneath it, where he was just safely covered when the door before mentioned was opened, and in came the lawyer, with a candle in his hand, and a large dressing-gown wrapped around him.

"Ah, here they are," he said, half aloud, as his eye fell upon the keys. "How stupid I am growing, to go away and leave them there! And yet, after all, they are safe enough; for who can gain admittance into this apartment?"

"Who, indeed!" thought Joe to himself, as he overheard the soliloquy, and saw the lawyer's movements through a hole in the sofa covering.

Hooker sat down on one of the tall stools, and began thinking aloud, as he often did when alone.

"He's a capital fellow that Joe. How cleverly he goes about things!"

"O ho! the old fellow is talking about me," whispered Joe to himself. "He little knows that I am within four feet of him. He thinks me clever, though. Well this, at any rate, falsifies the old adage, that 'listeners never hear any good of themselves.'"

"Well, thanks to his activity, the girl has been most capitally got rid of, and the transaction has been a most profitable thing for both of us."

"No doubt of it," muttered Joe. "I wonder what your share of it comes to?"

"Three hundred a-year could scarcely be earned in an easier way," mused the lawyer, with a complacent expression of countenance.

"Three hundred!" thought Joe, indignantly. "What a cursed scoundrel you are, to do little or nothing in the matter, and yet get the lion's share of the profits!"

"Yet, after all, I am risking my character, and deserve to be well paid for it."

"What unconscionable assurance, to rate your character at three hundred a-year—a thing not worth a bad farthing! Never mind, I'll be about with you some day. I have got something in my pocket that will make you disgorge pretty freely, I guess." And with this soothing reflection, Joe smothered his indignation, and maintained a profound silence.

The lawyer's thoughts were so very pleasant, that he began

to pace the office from side to side, with his hands behind his back, and his head reclining lovingly on his bosom. The sofa was the terminus of his beat, and every time he reached it his foot came within an inch of Joe's leg.

"Confound it!" said Joe, mentally; "if he thrusts that little foot of his a bit farther, he will be sure to discover me. I wish to goodness he would be off to bed, and let me away; for I must be out of the neighbourhood ere morning dawns."

Instead, however, of departing, as Joe ardently desired, Hooker plumped slap down on the sofa, and began swaying his little spindle legs in the air. It was a spring seat, and sunk down considerably when any person sat upon it; consequently, the lawyer's weight made the space below much less, and, as Joe had originally too little room, it followed that his position was anything but comfortable.

"Blast you!" growled the nearly-suffocated Joe, as Hooker began to *shag* himself up and down; "you'll have the breath out of my body with your infernal mump, mumping."

Ignorant altogether of the inconvenience and pain he was inflicting, the self-gratulating lawyer continued to luxuriate in his pleasant contemplations; but at length when Joe was on the point of crying out with an oath for him to rise, he got up, took his candle and his keys, and made his exit, doubtless back to his bed-room.

"Who would have thought that fellow was so heavy?" sputtered Joe, crawling out panting from his confinement. "I declare he is sixteen stones, if he is a pound. Never mind, I'll be off now as fast as I can, in case he comes back again."

And groping his way out, he locked the doors behind him, and before the worthy inhabitants of Broomfield were

stirring, or before the first rays of morning streaked the eastern sky, he was far on his way towards Edinburgh.

Days and weeks passed on. The snows of another winter rested on the earth, and the peculiar joys of this season of the year were gladly partaken of by human hearts. Yes, dark and dreary as winter is, it has its pleasures—pleasures which mankind cannot afford to lose. It is the grand social fusionist. By it are holy fireside influences cultivated and cherished. When its frosty blasts rage without, they send family groups to cluster round the blazing hearth, and bask in the sunshine of each other's love. Here old ties are strengthened, and new friendships formed—here instruction and amusement, beautifully blended, serve to render the long nights useful and agreeable—here the gay laugh, the innocent prattle, the harmless joke, lighten the hearts of toiling millions—here glance meets glance of love and fondness—here infancy is gladdened, youth enlivened, and old age cheered—here, in short, are collected and experienced the grandest and most sacred feelings of humanity. Winter, we thank thee for thy yearly visit; despite thy angry tempests and biting winds, we thank thee; for by thee the currents of brotherly love are warmed, and the fires of social affection fanned. Though thou bindest up the rivers and streams with icy fetters, thou unloosest the bands of human sympathy, and by thy spell many pent-up floods of long-withheld loving-kindness gush freely forth. Thou comest with darkness and cold to stop many wheels of busy industry, but the breathing time thus afforded to panting workmen may be sanctified to the best of all purposes—worship and devotion. In the city and the village, in the lonely hamlet and the far-off farm-steading, in lowland and upland, by river and by sea, thou dispensest cheering blessings, and thy

yearly work in the world is holy and benign. All men welcome thee, all men love thee—only those shrink from thy approach whom poverty surrounds and want enchains. The poor outcast and houseless wanderer would shun thee if they could, for in thy joys and comforts they, alas! partake not, and all thy relentless severity they bitterly feel. O be very kind, be very pitiful, to such helpless and forsaken ones. When thou overtakest the homeless orphan, trudging desolately on the world's highway, blow gently on his unsheltered head, temper thy fierce winds to his defenceless condition. In the forest and the wilderness, on the mountain top and the open hill-side, where thou canst embrace only inanimate nature, give way to all thy wild wayward moods, sport thyself there as thou wilt; but, O, in mercy forbear to touch with thy coldest breath the hearts and the limbs that cannot get beyond thy reach!

During the months of the winter to which our tale refers, Jessie's imprisonment continued; but beyond being deprived of intercourse with friends, and open-air exercise, she experienced no discomfort. She was supplied with what books she asked for, warm clothes were procured for her, large fires were maintained in her room, and her food was of the best description. Absolutely, therefore, she was not in a very pitiable condition; yet, in her hours of reflection—many of which she of course had—she was often troubled with anxious thoughts. She wondered what her friends had done on her disappearance—particularly what William thought, did, and was doing, concerning her. She pictured to herself his anxiety and distress, and suspected, with a most becoming vanity, that he would institute a long, thorough, personal search. She hoped, too, that he would have an idea of the author and true cause of her abduction,

so that he might not be troubled either with thoughts unworthy of her, or fears regarding her safety.

The only annoyance to which she was subjected, was an occasional rudeness on the part of Joe. Of late he had become somewhat intemperate. Idleness and a full pocket very naturally led to this. He often felt time hang heavy on his hands; and, to kill it, he sought the company of others, wild and reckless like himself. It frequently happened, therefore, that he came home intoxicated; and, at such times, he took the notion of paying Jessie a visit. When sober, he very rarely came near her; and, when very far gone in drunkenness, he never intruded; but when in the stage called *elevated*—a stage which, to tell the truth, he seldom over-passed—he was sure to make his appearance in her attic chamber, and often annoyed her sadly. Joe was one of those persons who are very impertinent and *barfaced* in liquor. He lost all sense of propriety, and said and did things which, in his sober moments, he would never contemplate. Hence the love existing between young Ainslie and his prisoner was often his theme; and his coarse, unfeeling remarks were, to a sensitive nature like Jessie's, extremely painful.

One evening, after a scene of this kind, and immediately after Joe had left the room, the temptation to reveal her birth, and so escape from such insult, came strong upon the poor girl. She yielded so far to the contemplation of it as to draw the proofs from her bosom, and carefully examine them. While absorbed in their perusal, she did not observe that a pair of dark, piercing eyes, were watching her narrowly through a chink in the door. Her female attendant had come to prepare her table for supper; but, chancing to get a glimpse of her through the aperture,

she saw her take the papers from her breast, and begin to read them.

After watching her a while, she slipped down stairs, and informed Joe of what she had seen. The curiosity of both were strongly excited, and the woman was despatched to continue her observations, and notice if Jessie placed them again in her breast.

She had not long to wait till this was satisfactorily ascertained. After reading them slowly over, Jessie began to think again, and to wrestle with the temptation that had assailed her—to wrestle with and overcome it. "No, no," she murmured; "let me not yield to this weakness. Let patience have her perfect work, and soon perseverance may be rewarded."

Resolving thus, she replaced the papers in their accustomed abode, within the folds of her dress.

That night, when she slept soundly, the door of her chamber was gently opened, and a foot crossed noiselessly the floor of her apartment. It was the female, who, at the instance of Joe, had come to secure the papers. She cautiously approached the chair, on the back of which Jessie's gown hung, and, after a good deal of handling in the dark, seized her prize, and departed as stealthily as she came.

The following evening, Joe entered her room; and, as on the former night, he was slightly drunk, yet his air was somewhat peculiar. He wore an expression on his face which she had never seen before. It was one of mingled curiosity, interest, and respect—though the spirit within made him anything but bashful.

He stared at her for some time without speaking, and then muttered unconsciously—"Well, I never noticed it before; but it's strong, sure enough."

"What did you never notice before, Joe?" asked Jessie, quietly.

"Your likeness to your mother," was the abrupt and startling answer.

"My mother!" echoed Jessie, with a wild look, utterly at a loss to know his meaning. "Did you ever see my mother, that you speak of the resemblance?"

"O yes, I have seen the lady often, though I did not know *then* that she was your mother," said Joe, with a malicious smile on his countenance.

Jessie could only look at him, while her heart throbbed almost to bursting. Could he, by any possibility, have got an inkling of her cherished secret? And yet, by what means? His words, his looks, plainly showed that he knew or suspected something.

He approached to the opposite side of the table, and sat down fronting her. "You seem confounded, Miss Melville—or rather, I should say, *Miss Ainslie*," he said slowly, and with his eyes fixed on hers.

"Ha, ha!" he continued, seeing her alarm and consternation, which it was in vain for her to hide. "Who is non-plussed now? You had the better of me when you told me slap-dash that I was Sir William Ainslie's agent; but it is your turn to break down now, when I tell you that you are Sir William Ainslie's daughter."

"What mean you?" faltered Jessie, turning pale as death.

"Well, I just mean what I say—that you are the child of the baronet of Broomfield Park, a fact which you cannot deny."

Jessie instinctively put her hand to her breast, and felt that the papers were gone.

"Ah! you know now by what means I have got your secret," said Joe, who noticed the motion. "So, you see, he continued, "it is no use to hide the thing any longer, at least with me; though, confound me, if I can understand why you have hidden it at all."

It was seldom that Jessie gave way to anger, but at this moment her passion rose beyond all control. To think that what she had guarded with so much care, at so much cost, and from such a noble principle, was in the possession of another, and one, too, who would not scruple to betray her, was vexatious beyond endurance. She rose majestically from her chair, and drew herself up to her full height, her beautiful features flushed with indignation, scorn in her eye, and anger flashing over her whole countenance.

"Mean, cowardly villain," she exclaimed, "are you so lost to honour and respect, as sneakingly to rob a poor, defenceless girl of her dearest secret? Was it not a great enough wrong to take away my liberty—but must you break into the sacred treasure-house of my heart, and steal from thence the only thing I valued most? Walking on the face of this God's earth in the form of a man, have you so lost all manhood and every generous feeling, as to use the strength your Creator has given you, to oppress the weak, and meanly outwit and triumph over the helpless? For shame, sir; for shame! Were you not one of the most abject things that crawl abroad in the light of day, you would blush to think of such an act as you have committed; and, instead of coming thus impudently into the presence of your victim, to rejoice over her despair, you would hide yourself in some wilderness from the eyes of your fellows."

"Heyday, Miss," retorted Joe, who was just drunk enough to resent language which, in his sober moments,

would have overwhelmed him with shame; "a pretty sermon this you are preaching. But I would advise you to cut it short, else your audience may get refractory. I am not disposed to be lectured by a woman in this manner; and as for these papers," he added, drawing them from his pocket, "I shall put them into the hands of those who know better how to use them than you apparently do."

"Give me back my property," cried Jessie, making a dash at them across the table; but he was too quick for her, and kept them out of her reach.

"Not so fast, my pretty fair one," he said, mockingly. "You are nimble enough, but not sufficiently so to get beyond me."

But Jessie was now thoroughly roused. She felt the importance of recovering the papers, though, had she reflected a moment, she might have perceived how useless it was to contend with a strong man like Joe. Nevertheless, she actually, in her excited state, came round the table to force them from his grasp. He was half-amused, half-amazed at such a display, and retreated slowly towards the door, holding the papers above his head, and laughing at her fruitless efforts to obtain them. He continued his backward walk along the passage to the head of the steep wooden stair, she following and snatching eagerly at her property. So occupied were they both, that the presence of the stair behind was quite unnoticed. Back, and still farther back, went Joe, wholly intent on keeping the papers out of Jessie's reach, till with fearful force he fell backwards from the top to the bottom of the steps, where he lay writhing in agony. His leg was broken!

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MORAL CHANGE.

For many weeks Joe Stewart lay weak and helpless—subdued by suffering, and forced by circumstances to commune with his own heart. Such seasons, in the life of man, have often been blessed seasons—affording to the thoughtless and reckless time for reflection, giving memory and conscience an opportunity of raising their voice, and speaking in tones which the soul is compelled to listen to, to tremble at, and, perchance, obey. A sick-bed is not always a place of unmixed affliction. On its uneasy surface many sinful careers have been checked—many hearts of stone made hearts of flesh; and when renewed health came pouring back into the streams of life, it came not only to restore the old physical strength, but to give energy to new desires, stability to new faith, and encouragement to a zealous perseverance in a better and holier path. A bed of pain and weakness thus becomes, at times, a vestibule to the true temple of life, the starting point of noble human careers, the birthplace of heroes, the spot in time which alike makes and marks the beginnings of glorious, eternal destinies.

It was a place something like this to Joe Stewart. During these long tedious hours of restlessness and quiet he was carefully, nay, assiduously, nursed by Jessie Mel-

ville. Before he would consent to rise from the spot where he had fallen, or have a doctor called in to set the broken limb, he exacted from Jessie a promise, that she would not seek, by word or action, to regain her liberty. This the heroic girl gave, and Joe was now sufficiently acquainted with her to know that she would faithfully keep her word. But she did more—far more than he expected or dreamed of. Night and day she attended him, ministered to his wants, smoothed, with gentle hand, his uneasy pillow, and sought, by many means, successfully to promote his recovery.

O, how true are the Scripture words, that the kindness and assistance of those whom we have wronged are like coals of fire heaped upon our head! As Joe felt the alleviating tenderness, and experienced the unwearied care of her whom he had so deeply injured, he endured pangs of agony and remorse. Her very kindness wounded while it cured, and festered where it wounded. Day after day, as he lay on his bed, and received her benefactions, he reflected seriously, though silently, on past events, and, as he thought, he repented. Regret, self-reproach, and shame took up their abode in his breast; and ever as her gentle hands eased his bodily pain, they ceased not to play the part of tormenting demons.

Yet, while he repented, he wondered. He was utterly puzzled by such conduct on her part. It was so entirely opposed to his principles of action—so different from his experience of the practice of others—that he sought in vain to account for it. Deeply mysterious as it was to him, however, it failed not to have its due influence. He regarded Jessie with—we were going to say—respect; but such a word is very inadequate to designate the feeling. It was

that kind of love which approaches adoration. Yes, he adored her—looked up to her as a superior being—as far above the level of ordinary mortals. A feeling like this easily begets devotion; hence Joe resolved, as soon as he was able, to atone, as far as possible, for the injury he had done her. He would devote his whole life to her service—study all her desires, and strive to the utmost to get them gratified.

These resolutions and changes in feeling were but the outcoming of Joe's better nature. All along he had generous qualities slumbering in his constitution, but, for want of opportunity, they had been inoperative; and *because* of opportunity, the baser portions of his being had been awake and active. The latter were now deprived of exercise as he lay confined in his silent room; and the influences by which he was surrounded called the former from their long sleep. Up they sprang in strength and ardour to a glorious resurrection, and grandly they glowed in their morning life. Amid mist and dimness they looked forth on the future, and panted to go forth on their active mission. Joe's chief desire now was to get strong again, that he might perform the work of atonement and reparation.

Jessie, watching him from day to day, saw with delight the change that was coming over him, observed with pleasure the influence she was acquiring, and hoped now to be able to effect her long-cherished contemplation—his conversion from scepticism to faith, from infidelity to Christianity.

It was a beautiful, bright, balmy day in early spring—"the winter was past—the rain was over and gone—the flowers had appeared on the earth—the time of the singing of birds had come, and the voice of the turtle was heard in the land." But, very, very little of such sights and sounds

penetrated into the dingy close, or the dark, dim room in which Jessie sat by the bedside of the now convalescent Joe. The pure, healthy air, which came from the Pentlands, lost much of its sweetness and salubrity ere it hovered over the tall houses in the wynds and closes that sloped down from both sides of the High Street. There it hung, dense and smoky, keeping out the glorious sunshine that was every where else playing freely on the face of Nature. But, thank God, there is a moral as well as a physical sunshine, and even amid the dark Edinburgh closes it lights up scenes of loveliness and grandeur, akin in brightness and gladsomeness to the splendour of a cloudless summer landscape.

Jessie was busy reading, for she thought Joe slept; but chancing to lift her eye from the book, she saw he was looking earnestly upon her face.

"O, Joe, I thought you were sleeping," she said, "you were so still and quiet."

"No, Miss Melville; I was busy thinking."

"Well, it is good to think sometimes; it may chance to make us better than we were before."

"I wish I were made better than I have been," said Joe, with a sigh.

"I am glad to hear you express that desire, Joe; and if you are in earnest about it, I have no doubt you will become better."

"Will you answer me a question, Miss Melville?"

"Certainly, Joe, if I can."

"How does it come to pass that during my illness you have been so kind to me—you whom I have treated so badly? I have been puzzling myself to discover the cause of such unheard-of generosity, but entirely without success."

"In what way did you expect I would have behaved?" asked Jessie, with gentle quietness.

"I thought you would rejoice at my accident, and leave me to shift as I best could. Instead of this, you have been as attentive to me as if I had been your best friend."

"I am glad you have been benefited by my assistance. But do you not think I did well? Does your reason and all the faculties of your nature not approve of my conduct, and would you think it more becoming if I had left you in the way you describe?"

"No, I would not. I am filled both with gratitude and admiration; but it is so different from what other people do, I don't know any one but yourself who would act as you have done."

"O yes, Joe; there are very many in the world who would have done the same, only you have not fallen in with such before. You have been unfortunate enough to see only the night side of humanity, and you thought it was the only side. Yet you are willing to admit that my kind of practice is the right kind. You would prefer to see every one doing, and doing much better, the same thing that I have done to you."

"As to doing it better, that is impossible," said Joe, decidedly. "But every one must see that your way is the right way, and the way that all men should do."

"How glad I am to hear you say that it recommends itself to your reason and judgment, as indeed it must do to the reason and judgment of all unprejudiced men. Now, you want to know what induced me to follow this course in preference to that which you say—and, alas! say truly—is natural to men?"

"Yes, this is what has puzzled me from the very first."

"Well, you see this book I have in my hand—you know what book it is?"

"Yes, I see it is the Bible I got for you; but what has that to do with it?"

"Much—very much. It is because I believe and endeavour to obey the precepts of this book that I have acted in the way which has astonished you so much.

"Nonsense," exclaimed Joe, with an incredulous smile. "It is just the folks who go to church and read the Bible who behave in quite an opposite manner."

"It must be because they do not act as the Bible commands them, then," said Jessie, "else they would assuredly do something very different."

"And do you really mean to say that the Bible teaches you to be kind to those who injure you?"

"Yes it does, indeed. Would you like to hear what it says about it?"

Joe looked as if he would, but said nothing.

Jessie turned over the leaves, and read in a clear voice, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you."

"Well, I never!" ejaculated Joe, with indignant wonder. "And are these words printed in all Bibles?"

"In every one," answered Jessie. "You see you have been slighting this book most unjustly. It was very wrong to despise and reject it without reading it. You looked at the conduct of 'the great folks,' as you call them, who professed to make the Bible the rule of their conduct; and finding that that conduct was utterly opposed to your inherent convictions of right and wrong, you very properly condemned it, but very improperly condemned the Bible along with it.

You erred grievously in assuming that the practice your moral nature rebelled against was that enjoined by this book. Here the very first sentence I have read to you is in perfect harmony with all your moral feelings, and I have no doubt that every word it contains you will cordially subscribe to. Its precepts, you will own as just and holy, its morality spotless, its doctrines divine, its promises precious, and all its teachings sublime. In short, when you read it, you will be forced to admit, that were it indeed to become the rule of human life, this world would become a very different dwelling-place; its thousand miseries and million wrongs would all disappear; love and kindness and universal brotherhood would prevail, and the present scene would be but the prelude to an eternal happy future."

The enthusiasm of the beautiful girl advocating this best of all books, inspired Joe with an intense desire to become better acquainted with it, and he pleaded with Jessie that she would read it to him, and tell him all about it. This request was joyfully received by her, and that very night she began her work. And she began, too, at the right place—the life and death of Christ, and its great Divine meaning—that wondrous story of love and mercy which captivates and subdues all hearts, which none can resist, and none can condemn. As the transcendent character of that Holy One was presented to his gaze, as the thrilling incidents of that unparralleled career from Bethlehem to Calvary passed before him, as he listened to the gracious words of Him who spake as never man spake, as he was brought face to face with the wrongs He endured, the parables He uttered, the miracles He performed, and the death He died, the strong man wept like a child, and alternately mourned and rejoiced—mourned when he thought how long he had been ignorant

of these glorious things, and how wickedly he had treated the Book which contained them—and rejoiced because the good news had at length reached him. In one hour his whole course of thought and feeling was changed. Child-like, he lay listening to and receiving the words of eternal life, and child-like, too, he trusted and believed them. It could not be otherwise. Every one of them came endorsed by conscience, corroborated by reason, and recommended by every necessity of the heart; and, therefore, they became “glad tidings of great joy,” which the soul welcomed and gratefully rejoiced over.

It is ever so. Let the religion of the Bible be presented to the honest, manly heart, divested of the obscurity and misrepresentation in which creeds have enveloped it, and it finds a ready lodgment there. Nine-tenths of the scepticism and infidelity which abounds at this moment in Christendom, is not genuine. It is a scepticism as regards interpretations and distortions of the Bible, but not as regards the teachings of the Book itself—the mournful and deplorable error being, that these distortions are considered the genuine utterances of the Divine Book, and that, therefore, that Book ought to be rejected. Do any of our readers belong to the class called sceptics? We would, with much deference, tender them an advice. Be sure that your scepticism is rightly based. See that it rests not on a human version of the Bible, but on the Bible itself, after a careful, honest, unprejudiced perusal. Do this, we beseech you, and if you can conscientiously build your infidelity on such a basis, we dare neither judge nor condemn you. We may wonder at you, but further we dare not, cannot go.

The circumstances which surrounded Jessie Melville were now entirely changed. Joe Stewart was now become her

devoted servant, and eagerly panted to promote her welfare. He was nearly strong again, and wished to know how she desired matters, as concerned herself, to turn. He had not as yet fathomed her object in concealing her birth, but confidently believed that she was and had always been actuated by the noblest and most Christian motives. He also bethought himself of the valuable information and assistance he was able to render both to her and Mr Ainslie, though, before making any communication, he pondered the matter thoroughly in his mind.

Jessie, on her part, kept an unbroken silence on the subject, feeling sure that Joe would introduce it himself very soon. Nor was she mistaken. One afternoon, when he was sitting comfortably by the fire, he asked her to come to him. She went and took a seat opposite, and regarded him with interest; for she saw he was unusually moved, partly, as she thought, with pleasurable, and partly with painful feelings.

"I hope you still feel yourself getting stronger?" she said, in order to break the silence.

"Yes, thanks to your goodness, Miss Melville, and the kindness of Providence, I am nearly as well as ever I was. But will you not allow me to call you by your rightful name yet?"

"Not yet, Joe," answered Jessie, with her old, sweet smile. "I have strong reasons for concealment at present, and I know you will not *now* betray me."

"Never," exclaimed Joe, earnestly. "Once I meant to go straight to your father with the papers, but I was wild then and ignorant. I see things in a different light now, and will be proud to do whatever you wish. Only, I don't like to think of you living in this mean, obscure way, when you might be the adored inhabitant of Broomfield Park."

"And have you not comprehended the cause of my conduct?" inquired Jessie, with a blush.

"Not a bit of it," answered Joe, eyeing her curiously, as if from an examination of her countenance he could solve the riddle.

"You know who the doctor changed me for?"

"Of course, Mr Ainslie, or rather the gentleman who goes by that name."

"Well, you have some idea how Mr Ainslie and I stand to each other?"

"Yes; and that is just why I wonder so much at your silence. Had you discovered your birth to Sir William, when he was so furious against the marriage, he would have at once changed his tone, and allowed it to proceed."

"I am not so sure of that," rejoined Jessie. "I might, no doubt, have proved satisfactorily that I was his daughter; but the opposition might have continued, only in a reversed way. Instead of me being then the object of his contempt, it would have been Wil——, I mean Mr Ainslie; for I understand Sir William places birth beyond either goodness or affection."

"And so it was for Mr Ainslie's sake that you made this sacrifice?" said Joe, admiringly. "Well, I do hope you will be rewarded for it all. How the baronet will stare when he knows the truth! I should like to be where I could have a good view of his face when you tell him. But what do you wish to do now?—for, as I am almost better, I want to know how I can assist you?"

"O, but you are my jailer, you know," said Jessie, archly, "and jailers should not connive at the escape of their prisoners."

"Nonsense," said Joe, with a distressed look. "I don't

mean to take another penny from Hooker, and you shall be free, though I should starve."

Jessie was now reaping the fruits of her labour—the strong, good-natured Joe, once her sworn enemy, was purged of much of the dross that had surrounded his heart, and turned into an ardent protecting friend, resolved to promote her interests at whatever hazard to himself. The tree of duty, which she had planted and watered, was now shaking down its pleasant fruit into her bosom.

In reply to Joe's last words, she said :—"I will not say that you surprise me by avowing this intention—I fully expected it; for when a generous nature like yours is awakened, and the law of duty laid bare before it, it cannot hesitate to obey it. Your aid I will therefore thankfully and gratefully accept. You want to know what my first wish is?"

"Yes, I do," returned Joe, with sparkling eyes.

"Well, it is to meet with Mr Ainslie—*young Mr Ainslie*, of course. Have you seen or heard anything of him since—since I came to live here?"

"Nothing whatever. Hooker, at my first visit to him after your capture, desired me to keep entirely out of the way; never, in fact, to show myself near Broomfield at all; and, *except in a single instance*, I implicitly obeyed him."

"Did my disappearance occasion no stir even in Edinburgh?"

"I never heard that it did, and this has astonished me a good deal. I expected that a hue-and-cry would get up immediately—that the walls would be covered with placards, headed, 'Young Lady Missing,' and containing a minute description of your appearance, and a liberal reward offered for information concerning you—but nothing of the sort

occurred; and, unless it was owing to Sir William's influence, I cannot account for it, though, at the time, I considered it a most fortunate oversight."

Jessie thought it very likely that Sir William had, by some means or other, prevented a noise being made about the affair, or the circumstance reaching the ears of the public; but she felt confident that her lover had spared no pains to discover and release her, though he had failed; and, of course, no wonder, seeing how expertly and cleverly Joe had effected her capture.

"Do you think you could get an interview with Mr Ainslie," asked Jessie, "and inform him of the whole case?"

"I will do my best," said Joe, unhesitatingly; "though it might be better not to let the others suspect the change in my views till we are better prepared to carry them out."

"By all means," returned Jessie; "and, therefore, I would rather not leave this place till I have seen Mr Ainslie, and consulted with him as to future proceedings."

"Then to-morrow I shall set out on my mission," said Joe, rising briskly, and testing the strength of his leg.

"But are you quite sure you are strong enough?" asked the prudent, kind-hearted girl.

"Able and willing," exclaimed Joe, joyfully. "O, Miss Melville," he continued, "how glad I am to think I can help you in any way! If I could not atone, in some measure, for my share in the villany that has been practised against you, I should have been one of the most miserable creatures on the face of the earth."

"Don't think about the past any more, Joe, except to make it the ground of thanksgiving. He who brings good out of evil, has made your share in my imprisonment the

means of bringing you back from the dark, desolate, dangerous region in which you were wandering; and as I have been the instrument, in His hand, for accomplishing it, neither you nor I have now cause to regret it."

"Thank you, Miss Melville," said Joe, in a husky voice, and taking her hand in his own; "you are the kindest lady ever I knew or heard of. Never can I repay the debt of gratitude I owe you; but if every moment of my life, spent in your behalf, can count for anything, then will I most gladly spend it so."

"Nay, nay, Joe," replied Jessie, with a tear in her eye; "you are magnifying both your crime and my services. I have done nothing to deserve such devotion on your part; and though you have erred, and that deeply—not so much against me as against God—yet, you know, he says in His own Book, that repentance and amendment ever meet with pardon at His hands. But, come, let us leave this subject at present. You had better retire to rest now, if you are going in search of Mr Ainslie to-morrow; so, good night, and a calm sleep to you."

"Stop a moment, Miss Melville," said Joe, as Jessie was leaving the room; "I have something more to say to you."

She turned round and came again to the fire. He drew a piece of folded parchment from his bosom, and holding it up with a pleased smile on his face, said:—

"Papers have not been pleasant things for us to talk about of late; but this one, I think, will prove an exception. What do you think it is?"

"Well, I have no idea," answered Jessie, with a composed face, yet laughing voice. "It is rather a formidable-looking article."

"Formidable enough it will prove to some folks," replied

Joe, with a chuckle. "But you would never guess what it is, so I will tell you. It is neither more nor less than the late Mrs Ainslie's will.

"Grace Fergusson's will!" exclaimed Jessie, starting forward with astonishment. "I never knew she made one."

"No, nor did anybody except myself and other three."

"And why was it not produced at her death?"

"For a very good reason. It would have deprived the lawyer who made it of a good round sum, I suspect."

"And that lawyer was——"

"Daniel Hooker," answered Joe, nodding significantly.

"But how could the suppression benefit him?" asked Jessie, with a wondering expression.

"Why, in this way. The will put her husband, Mr Ainslie, in possession of the whole of her property; but had such a will never been made, the estate would have come to Mr Bob Fergusson. Now, Mr Fergusson is Hooker's brother-in-law, and the lawyer naturally wished him to get it. As the will was secretly drawn out and witnessed, its suppression became practicable when the death took place. I was one of the witnesses—the other died; and Hooker, for a certain sum, agreed to put the will into Mr Fergusson's hands. Fergusson, it seems, would not come up to his mark; but, to have a pull upon him afterwards, Hooker forged a new one, and placed the original in safe keeping, as he thought, in his office. That forged one Mr Fergusson got and destroyed, thinking all safe. The real one I have got, nobody knows how, not even Hooker himself, and you had better keep it till you can give it to Mr Ainslie."

Jessie took the parchment from him mechanically. She was surprised beyond measure by Joe's hurried story, and, for some moments, did not know what to say. Here was

another piece of villany disclosed to her—villany which had thrown William out of his wife's bequeathing, which had obscured Grace's generous conduct, and put a rascal into wealth which did not belong to him.

"Thank you, Joe, for this," said Jessie, after a pause. "Now, will you oblige me by saying nothing about it to any one, not even to Mr Ainslie. I should like to give him the pleasant surprise myself."

"All right; I understand," replied Joe, brightly, seeing her pleased look. "I declare I never was so glad all my life as I am at this moment. Shake hands with me again, Miss Melville, and say once more that you forgive me."

"I do most heartily," replied Jessie, holding out her hand, which Joe grasped warmly. He would have kissed it, but he thought that would be using too much freedom.

"Good night, Joe."

"Good night, Miss Melville, and God bless you."

CHAPTER XX.

FATHER AND SON.

WE must now return to Heriot Row and Broomfield Park, to notice how Jessie's disappearance affected the various personages of our story. It was not till late on the morning following the wedding that Mrs Fergusson grew uneasy at her absence. On such an occasion as a marriage, it was not unusual to prolong the revelry till next day, and she thought that Jessie might have stayed to partake of it; though she did feel it rather unlike her to abide in such a festive scene, after so lately taking part in a very different and much more solemn one.

But when the day wore on, and Jessie came not, she grew anxious and alarmed. She would have sent to seek her, but knew not where. She had no notion of whose wedding she was attending, or where it was to be celebrated—whether in the Old or New Town—and was, therefore, quite at a loss in what direction to inquire after her.

Night came, and still no Jessie. Something must have happened her, thought Mrs Fergusson; and the idea was agonizing, for she loved her now as her own child. Independent of Grace's dying request, Jessie's own goodness and amiableness drew all Mrs Fergusson's affections towards her, and caused her to lavish upon her the warm gushings of her motherly heart. She knew not what to do; whether

to announce publicly her disappearance, or wait some time longer in the hope that she would re-appear. But when midnight came, and brought no intelligence, she bethought herself of despatching a messenger to Broomfield Park, to acquaint William Ainslie with the strange circumstance, and request his advice and assistance. Remembering that William had been the means of bringing her to Heriot Row, she naturally thought he took an interest in her, and would, on this occasion, direct, and actively engage in, any search that might be made for her. She wrote a hurried note, giving a brief account of the painful matter, and despatched a trusty messenger with it shortly after midnight.

The sun had but newly risen, when William Ainslie proceeded to a favourite flower-plot to tend the springing of a few late flowers. He was bending over their fresh, green leaves and growing stems, when the sound of a horse's footsteps, coming rapidly up the avenue, reached his ear, and caused him to turn his eyes in that direction. Far down among the old trees he discerned a rider urging forward an apparently exhausted steed. The poor animal was covered with foam, and at every exhalation a volume of smoke flew from its nostrils into the frosty morning air. Still the rider spurred him on, and he slackened not his pace till he neared the house. Perceiving William on the other side of the privet hedge, and supposing him to be one of the servants, he called to him, and inquired if he could lead him to young Mr Ainslie.

"I am the person you seek," answered William; "what do you want with me?"

"I have a letter for you, sir, from Mrs Fergusson, and was requested to travel fast all night that you might get it speedily."

"Indeed! let me have it then; and take your horse round to the stables, for I see he is very tired."

William received the letter and opened it, wondering what it might contain that so much haste was necessary. He read but few words, when he turned pale and staggered against the trunk of a tree. Then, rousing himself, with a wild bound he cleared the hedge, and rushed towards the house, giving orders to a servant, whom he met by the way, to have his horse saddled instantly.

He bounded up the principal stair-case, and on the landing encountered his father; but, in his terrible agitation, he was passing him without speaking. His father, perceiving his wildness and excitement, dreaded that the news of Jessie's capture had reached him; and, like all guilty persons, his presence of mind failed at the moment, and, by one question, he betrayed himself.

"Is anything wrong at Edinburgh, William?" he asked.

His son paused suddenly, and sent a piercing look into his face, before the stern ardour of which he quailed, and his eye fell.

"Ha!" exclaimed William, as the truth flashed upon him, "you are the cause of this. It is at your instigation that she has been captured. But you shall answer for it. Before God and man you shall answer for it; and if a hair of her head is injured, you shall deeply rue it."

"For Heaven's sake, be calm," said Sir William. "Remember the servants are within hearing. Do not disgrace both yourself and me by such unwarrantable language."

"My language is not unwarrantable, as your conscience well knows. But you shall tell me where she has been conveyed, and restore her to me uninjured, or your name shall

become a bye-word in Scotland, and your base, unmanly conduct the reprobation of every honest man."

"I cannot imagine what you mean," faltered the guilty but unrepentant parent, terrified by his violence; "but come with me to the library, and tell me quietly the meaning of such an outrageous demeanour."

"Be it so, sir," replied Ainslie, "since you find it inconvenient to have your actions called to account before others. But do not suppose that I will be evaded or imposed upon."

They entered the library, the door of which the baronet carefully closed, and endeavouring to assume his usual lofty look, he turned to his son and said—

"Now, sir, will you tell me the meaning of this?"

"You know the meaning of it, sir, without being told," exclaimed William, impetuously. "You know that by your directions a lady has been imprisoned, and is at this moment guarded somewhere about the city."

"To whom do you refer," asked Sir William, coldly, "and how do you come to charge me with being accessory to the crime—I mean the—the——"

"You are right, sir," rejoined Ainslie, with a bitter smile. "It is indeed a crime, and one which the law punishes most severely. But, without another word, tell me where she is, for I must know?"

"Who are you inquiring after?" said the baronet, with an ill-dissembled expression of ignorance on his countenance.

"Who?—you know who. But to remove all pretence for further evasions of this kind, let me tell you that I have just received, by an express messenger, a note from Aunt Fergusson, stating that Jessie Melville left her home

nearly two days ago on a visit to a friend, and has not returned."

"And what leads you to suspect my connection with the affair?"

"Yourself sir," replied William, sternly.

"Myself! how so?"

"By the question you put to me on the stairs. Till that moment I suspected no one, indeed, had no idea of the cause of her absence; but your inquiry was so indicative of a guilty knowledge, that, like a flash of lightning, it made me understand the truth exactly."

"Upon my word, sir," said Sir William, with a mocking laugh, "your grounds for such a foul suspicion are indeed strong. How dare you insult me with a charge like this," he added, with affected angry seriousness, "when you have not the shadow of evidence to support you?"

"My evidence grows stronger every moment," answered Ainslie. "Debased as you are, you dare not deny a knowledge of the lady's seizure—dare not deny that you authorized and approved of it."

"Because I would consider it beneath my dignity to repel such a wanton charge. Had there been even the most remote circumstance connecting me with the matter, I would have taken the trouble to vindicate my character; but since you do not, and cannot, show any proof whatever to substantiate your absurd suspicion, I consider it utterly unworthy of me to descend to exculpation."

"Father, did I not know you better, I might be imposed upon by such an assumption of injured innocence; but unfortunately, both for yourself and me, my mind reverts to a former scene, and former sentiments, which leads me to suspect you most strongly; and your unguarded question on

the stairs, adds tenfold to the suspicion. The only method therefore, to remove it from my mind, is for you to declare solemnly and distinctly, that you know nothing whatever of the matter, and never by word or action authorized the abduction of Jessie Melville."

Sir William was silent. Greatly as he had debased himself to prevent the union, he was not prepared to utter a gross, deliberate falsehood. His proud mind was not so wholly lost to honour and respect as to utter a lie; and while he felt the keen eye of his son fixed upon him waiting an answer to his last words, he reddened and became confused. As he felt the meanness of his position, too, he became angry, for he felt himself wounded in the most tender part. He was shorn of his dignity, cast down from the superior position he loved to occupy in the eyes of others, and stood before his son speechless and convicted. At the thought of this he was enraged, and the old spirit of undisguised wrath was fast taking possession of him.

"I do not choose to be judicially examined by you in this way, sir," he said, endeavouring to escape from the dilemma by a haughty bearing. "This is no position for a father to occupy, nor will I submit to it any longer."

"You are right, sir," returned Ainslie, bitterly; "it is not a position either for a father or a man, but it is yourself that has created the position. I sought not, Heaven knows, to place you in it; and if you feel it degrading, you have yourself, and yourself alone, to thank for it. But whatever faint doubts I may have had at the beginning of this conversation concerning your participation in Jessie's disappearance, these are now, alas! removed. You ~~did~~ authorize the deed. You have a perfect knowledge of the whole matter. If you did not plan it, you caused it to

be planned, and you have agreed to pay the instruments you employed."

The baronet actually trembled at the correctness of William's surmises; yet his pride and anger rose in proportion to the evidence of his guilt, and his passion became every moment more ungovernable. Very little more was needed to cause him to drop the mask, and let the fierce, relentless feelings of his heart show themselves; and the next words of his son demolished the last frail barrier, and let the turbulent flood rush forth.

"I need scarcely say I am not ignorant of your motive in adopting this desperate and lawless course," said the latter, in a stern tone. "You judged that now, when, by the will of Heaven, the barrier between Jessie and myself is removed, I would marry her, and it was to prevent this that you sanctioned this despicable deed. Let me tell you here that you judged truly. My firm and unalterable intention is to marry Jessie Melville. Ay, sir, glance not thus scornfully and angrily; I repeat it, my fixed resolution is to unite myself with this lady, and no attempts of yours shall prevent me."

"You forget, sir, that the lady, as you call her, may have changed her mind," said the baronet, with a provoking sneer. "If she has left your aunt's house, as you say she has, doubtless it has been to fly into the arms of some other gentleman. You will thereby be saved both the trouble and opportunity of fulfilling this magnanimous intention!"

"Forbear, sir," said William, with suppressed passion; "for my sake, and your own, forbear. There are limits even to a son's endurance, though there is not, in your case, a limit to a father's meanness and injustice. The insinuation you have just uttered is worthy only of scorn and con-

tempt, and that contempt cannot be separated from the utterer."

"Such insolence as this, sir, is not to be borne. You forget the respect due to your father."

"My father has forgot the respect due both to himself and his son. By deceit and falsehood he has forfeited the obedience and honour which all parents have a right to claim."

"Falsehood! sir," roared Sir William, now in a towering passion; "I uttered no falsehood. I never said that I knew nothing of this matter. On the contrary, I now avow that it was by my orders and direction that the whole thing took place. I was determined that your disgraceful and infatuated intentions should be baffled; and to do this effectually, the girl has been removed out of your way. Ay, and what is more to the purpose, she will not again cross your path till such a thing as a marriage with her is for ever out of the question."

"And pray, sir, what would constitute such a barrier in your eyes?" asked Ainslie, with calmness, though he was terribly pale, for wild maddening thoughts of wrong done to Jessie crossed his soul.

"Your marriage with a lady of whose social position I shall approve," replied Sir William, decidedly.

"And you are determined to keep Jessie Melville in imprisonment till such an event occur?" inquired his son, still with a calm voice.

"On this point I am firmly determined," answered the baronet, while his features assumed the stern inflexible cast which betokened an unrelenting resolution.

"But what if I cannot marry another? What if my affections are so deeply fixed on this lady as to make it impossible for me to marry another?"

"As to affection, sir, I have nothing to do with that. I don't see that it is at all necessary in our sphere of life. It is the duty of those in your position to stifle all such low-born feelings, and properly occupy the sphere in which Providence has placed you. This is a duty you owe to your family and the class of which you are a member."

"These are your sentiments, are they?" asked William, while a bitter smile of pity and contempt passed over his handsome but now flushed countenance.

"My exact sentiments," was the cold, laconic answer.

"Then listen to mine," rejoined his son, placing his back determinedly against the door, as if resolved not to let his father get beyond the reach of his voice. "By the great Heaven-ordained law of humanity, the basis, the only true basis of marriage, is love and mental assimilation. On no other basis than this can its sacred temple be reared; and whoso strives to seek for anything different is insanely and blasphemously subverting the laws of the Creator, besides assassinating human happiness, and adding tenfold to human misery. Among this degraded class of social traitors, you, sir, are placed. For worthless considerations of rank and station—things which the broad law of the universe recognises not—things which are hollow, false, and heart-withering—things which the aristocracy and purse-proud men of this country have formed into an idol, and set up on their Dura for all men to worship—for considerations of this kind, sir, you are willing to steep your character in dishonour, plunge your soul in crime, sacrifice the highest and noblest characteristics of your manhood, trample ruthlessly on the most sacred and tender feelings of others, and insult the Almighty by daring to invert and disturb the order of His arrangements. All this you are willing to do in the

service of the god of your idolatry, and to gratify a sinful, Heaven-disowned pride. But think ye that all men are altogether such as you are? Think ye that every one of those your fellows who tread with you the surface of God's green earth are given up, with you, to such a devil-worship as this? Or think ye that if they dare to assert their manhood, and abide by the best instincts of their nature, you have the right, or will have the power, to mould them to your will—to crush them, soul and body, beneath the car of your Juggernaut? No; the God who made this world and the men who are in it, is still its governor, and will never allow your unholy tyranny to prevail. For myself, I hereby renounce all connection with you. You have snapt asunder, with impious hand, the tie—the sacred tie—that Heaven placed between us. I owe you no further respect or obedience. And rather than suffer the wrong you would inflict, I shall go forth to battle alone with the world, accepting of no favour from you—making my own way as I best can—and there, at least, if I receive not your bounty, I shall be free from your oppression. Nay, speak not, sir; I am not yet done; and hear me out you must. When conscience comes to speak within you, as it surely will some day—when you are compelled, whether you will or no, to review the history of that principle you are now upholding—turn your eyes towards that class you adore, and would sacrilegiously support. Look at the results of those marriages of convenience and of policy which so frequently take place in the ranks of the British aristocracy. Look at the misery and the sin, the wretchedness, the crime, the despair, which flow from them. When the domestic history of the British aristocracy is written, it will be one long record of ignominy and discord. Like the Prophet's roll, it

will be written, within and without, with lamentations and mourning and woe. Its revelations of crushed hearts, broken vows, joyless homes, and polluted marriage-beds—its burdens of sighs and groans—its rivers of tears—its mountains of sorrow—shall all congregate together to become the wonder and amazement of a horror-stricken world. And what is the cause of all, or nearly all, this deplorable sin and suffering? Is it not the practice of divorcing marriage and affection—the putting ruthlessly asunder of those two things which God hath joined? It is—it is. And so long as this practice—begotten of pride and a false idea—shall prevail, so long shall it all continue. Let me, however, protest against it—let me have neither part nor lot in such unholy doings. I am about to leave you, perhaps for ever; but these, my words, I leave behind as a testimony against you.”

During the outburst of this torrent of eloquent denunciation, the baronet stood as one *dumfounded*, to use a homely Scotch word. His son's vehemence and terrible utterings cut him to the heart, but his pride would in no wise give way. As William concluded, he threw himself sullenly into a chair; and the young man was about to leave the room without another word. He paused as he grasped the handle of the door, and looked back.

“One word more,” he said. “Will you say, before I leave you, where I may find Jessie Melville?”

“Never,” exclaimed the baronet, starting up fiercely. “I will take care that she is put for ever beyond your reach,”

“That is impossible,” returned William. “She is in Edinburgh, I know, and cannot long be concealed. Every effort that love can make I will put forth to discover her, and be assured I will succeed. Farewell.”

"Go, ungrateful, rebellious boy," said the old, unbending man. "Go, and take with you a father's heaviest curse."

"Even this I fear not," said William, looking sadly back. "If you turn over the leaves of the sacred volume lying before you, you will find these words written therein—
'The curse causeless shall not come.'"

These were his last words. He ran down the stairs, sprang upon the horse which the servant had ready for him at the door, and rode rapidly off, on the way to Edinburgh.

CHAPTER XXI.

WINTER WORK.

SIR WILLIAM AINSLIE was left in a state of much alarm and anxiety, being fearful that Jessie's place of confinement would be discovered. For anything else, he cared not. His son's fate, so long as he cherished sentiments so socially heterodox, did not cause him much uneasiness. He would rather see him dead and buried in the odour of aristocratic sanctity, than married to one beneath his rank. While, therefore, he saw him ride rapidly off, with the intention of never again returning, his strongest feeling was fear lest he might succeed in discovering Jessie. So mightily did this work upon him, that about an hour after William's departure, he resolved to go down to Lawyer Hooker to seek advice, and, it might be, consolation from him.

"Good morning, Sir William," exclaimed the lawyer, rising, and bowing with his blandest smile, as his visitor entered his sanctum.

"Good morning, Mr Hooker," replied the baronet. "The girl is captured, I am informed."

Hooker looked at Sir William in surprise. "May I ask how the information has reached you? I am but newly advised of it, and thought no one here but myself could know of it."

"That is not the case, however. My son has this morning

received a communication from his aunt conveying the tidings. By some means or other, he suspected that it had been done at my instigation, and charged me with it so insolently, that in my passion I avowed it. He has just gone off to search for her, and I tremble for the result."

"Make yourself perfectly easy on that score," returned Hooker. "Joe Stewart has just been here, and from what he tells me of the manner of the seizure, and the place of her confinement, it is impossible that Mr Ainslie can get any tidings of her. I have charged him not to leave town again, or hold any further communication with us; by this means all proof of our connection with the matter will fail to appear, and, at the same time, no clue will be given to those who conduct the search."

"You are quite sure there is no fear of detection?" said the baronet, anxiously.

"Quite sure," returned the lawyer, confidently.

"That is well," rejoined Sir William, with a bitter smile.

"Then he will soon return to his senses."

"Allow me to doubt that, Sir William," observed his listener. "From what I know of Mr Ainslie, I fear that he will never be induced to comply with your wishes, unless we exercise a little power which we possess."

"What power?" asked Sir William, quickly.

"The power of threatening," was the quiet answer.

"Ah, you don't know him," said the baronet; "he would fear no threat of ours."

"Not for himself," replied the deep scoundrel; "but if you make suffering, inflicted on Jessie, the price of his obstinacy, I think something might be done with him in that way."

"O, I cannot think of personally harming the girl."

"No need for it. Make him *believe* that you will, and that will sufficiently answer the purpose."

"Well, the thing is worth trying, at any rate, and when he comes back I shall try your plan."

But he did *not* come back, and so the diabolical scheme of the villanous Hooker could not be put in execution. Week after week passed on, and Ainslie was neither seen nor heard of, at least, by his father. Let us, however, follow him on his anxious way, and see how far he succeeds in his endeavour to discover his love, or how he managed to fight the battle of life against the fearful odds which his sudden renunciation of home caused to stand up against him.

Daniel Hooker was right when he said that the absence of anything like a clue would prevent the discovery of Jessie's prison-house. William's inquiries at Heriot Row resulted in little or nothing. No one there knew to what quarter of the town Jessie was going on the night of her disappearance, consequently no indication of her present whereabouts was to be gained, even remotely. He was informed it was to a wedding. It must, then, have been the wedding of a very intimate friend, for he justly thought that an ordinary occasion of the kind would not have drawn her out so speedily after the awfully impressive scene at the Grange. Now, the only intimate friend which he knew Jessie to have was Mary Richardson, and he knew, too, that she had been *carrying on* with Richard Sandilands, and that the marriage of the two might be expected. He resolved, first of all, therefore, to proceed to Messrs Chambers's folding-room, to learn if such an event had occurred, and where the young folks resided; for he imagined that Mary, if a wife, would *not now be working there*.

But, on his way to the High Street, he revolved again in his mind certain thoughts which had occupied it during his forenoon ride from Broomfield Park. When anything like reason and reflection came back after quitting the baronet, the first instinct of his nature pointed to silence and secrecy as respected the public. He saw the imprudence of exposing Sir William's weakness and crime, or of letting it be generally known that such a despicable deed had been committed. Such a course could not be beneficial to his own views and aims, since it would only irritate his father the more, and lead him to take more effectual measures to effect her secure imprisonment. In his inquiries, therefore, he resolved to be very guarded, so that those who did not already know of her disappearance might not be informed of it. He had learned from Mrs Fergusson that no one but those of her own household possessed the knowledge, and he earnestly impressed on her the necessity of commanding and enforcing the silence of the servants.

He pushed open the door of the folding-shop, and saw the girls busily plying their fingers among the sheets. Glancing along the rows for an intelligent face, at the owner of which he might ask about Mary, he was surprised to see Mary herself up in the far corner, and looking as blithe and good-natured as ever. This was a damper, for to him her presence there was an indication that she was not married. However, he would see and speak to her now; there could be no harm in that, if she did not bother him with eager questions about the health and welfare of her friend.

He made his way, as he best could, up between piles of unfolded sheets of the *Journal* and the stools on which the girls sat. Many of them smiled, for they knew him of old — knew him as Jessie Melville's sweetheart, when he used

to be standing at the top of the close with the plaid over his arm. He was a great favourite with them, too, in virtue of being *her* "chap," for she was loved by all in the shop, and they were sure he must be a nice fellow when Jessie countenanced him. Besides, he was tall and handsome, had "bonnie dark een" and luxuriant curling locks, and we all know how charms of this sort gain upon the girls. In himself, therefore, and by reason of his connection with Jessie, William Ainslie was greatly admired by the foldens; and when he suddenly appeared among them this afternoon, he was greeted with many smiles, and many glances of recognition and admiration were cast at him from beneath pretty eye-lashes, that concealed eyes not less handsome than his own.

Mary herself, however—the object of his visit—did not perceive him. She was busy putting to rights a sheet that had slipt in the first folding, and was holding it up between her and the light, to get the folios on the top of each other. Her whole attention being absorbed in this very interesting occupation, she saw nothing and heard nothing, till a full manly voice whispered in her ear—

"And how is my friend Mary this afternoon?"

"Guid gracious! Mr Ainslie, where hae ye sprung frae?" exclaimed Mary, turning round with a start, and letting the half-folded sheet fall down before her.

"Do you think I have come from the regions below?" said William, with a smile, at the same time pointing downwards.

"'Deed it looks gey like it," laughed Mary, "to start up at a body's elbow a' in a moment. But hoo is Jessie? I hinna seen her since yon nicht."

"What night?" asked William, while his heart gave a bound.

“O, ye ken well enough what nicht,” said Mary, with a blush.

At this moment he caught sight of a ring on her finger, and this, with the blush and the hanging head, assured him that she *was* married.

“But hoo is Jessie?” she continued, looking up with a strange expression in her countenance. To account for this expression, we must dive somewhat into the depths of Mary’s nature, and see how puzzled she has been of late on a certain subject. For a long time she never doubted that William and Jessie loved each other, and would finally marry. William’s marriage with Grace was, therefore, confounding to her, and the more so as Jessie had assured her it was with her entire concurrence. Something out of the ordinary course, she was sure, had occurred; but, like one or two more of the personages of our story, she could not understand the fearful sacrifice that had been made. Then she wondered if the death of Grace had brought things back to their old footing, or whether the two were still estranged from each other. It was this ignorance of the ground on which she was treading that brought the uncertain expression into her face, when, as we said before, she looked up and said, “But hoo is Jessie?”

“Well, I have not seen her for some time,” replied William, with forced composure. “I only came to town this morning; and, as she is not at Heriot Row just now, we have not met. But I just called to see you after your marriage, though I did not expect to find you here.”

“Where did ye think I wad be?—at hame?”

“Of course. Since you have turned housekeeper now, I fancied you would really *be* keeping house.”

“O, there’s nae occasion for that yet,” answered Mary, with

a sly twinkle. "I'm aye hame soon enough to mak Richard's meat; and if I can earn a few shillins for a while enow, it's as weel to lay bye as muckle as we can for a sair fit."

"O, ho! I understand," said William, with a smile; "you expect to work here for a few months yet?"

"Maybe aye and maybe no. Folk no kens—but we'll jist see," answered Mary, with a comical expression of maternal anticipation.

"Exactly; and I commend your provident forethought. Had you a merry party last Friday night, then? Did Jessie enjoy herself?" he inquired, with affected carelessness.

"Weel, she seemed gey hearty a' the time she stayed; but she went awa very early."

"Indeed! about what hour might it be?"

"Atween ten and eleven, if I mind richt."

"Richard would accompany her, I suppose?—unless, indeed, you were too jealous to suffer him."

"Deed no, I was nae sic thing; but she wadna hear o' onybody gaun hame wi' her. Nane but mysel kent when she gaed awa; and, when I telt Richard after, he was fit to tak my head aff for lettin her."

"A bad beginning of the married life that would have been," said William, trying to be jokesome, though the information he had just received was painful enough.

"Where did the ceremony come off?" he inquired.

"At the Horse Wynd, where we took up house," replied Mary.

And this was all that he could learn of the matter in this direction. Between the Horse Wynd and Heriot Row there stretched a long path, and Jessie had set out to traverse it alone at a late hour, affording ample opportunity

for the agent or agents of the baronet to seize her without being observed.

But we must not enumerate Ainslie's many conjectures. Suffice it to say, that after searching long and earnestly, he could obtain no further tidings of her. Yet he never despaired. Though day after day he failed, yet he trusted the morrow would see him more successful. He went no more to Heriot Row; and the only communication he held with Broomfield Park, was a letter which he sent to his mother, to allay the anxiety which he knew she must feel on his account. He went into plain lodgings in Lothian Street—preferring rather to live in obscurity and humble independence, than to continue in the house of a father whose principles of action were so sinfully mean and unjust.

But the small sum he chanced to have about him, when he came to Edinburgh, was now nearly exhausted; and he had been too much engrossed in the search for Jessie to employ any means of gaining a livelihood for himself, and it was not till one Saturday night, on finding that a solitary sixpence remained in his purse, after settling with his landlady, that he saw the necessity of doing something to increase his store. But what was that something to be? Here was the knotty point to solve. He would apply to none of his relations—that was a settled matter with him. He must rely solely on his own resources; work for himself—work—yes, work for his bread.

He revolved many projects in his mind, but found all of them more or less impracticable. For manual labour he was at present unfitted. He had no trade at his finger ends to resort to. Ha! yes, this must be his resource—literature. He would write—write for the newspapers, for the

magazines, for anything that would remunerate him, however slightly. His wants were few, his expenses limited; a little, a very little, money would suffice. Yes, he must write.

And write he did. From the well-filled storehouse of his mind—from the well-springs of his gushing heart—from the gapes and gashes of his wounded spirit—he poured forth breathing thoughts and burning words. From a mass of manuscripts he selected one—the most sober and philosophic—and wrote upon the back, “To the Editor of *Chambers’s Journal*.” Then, in the grey dusk, he proceeded with it to the publishing-office, and gave it in. But he could not expect payment for it, even if accepted, for some time; while the possibility of its return, with the chilling words, “Thanks, and regrets,” on the cover, was ever before him. He must, therefore, do something more—something on the principle of “small profits and quick returns,” for this his necessities imperatively demanded.

He wandered dreamily on, down the North Bridge, and along by the Post-Office, into the lobby of which he sauntered.

While pacing slowly backwards and forwards there, he chanced to look across the street, and saw the citizens entering and leaving the news-rooms. Another idea struck him. He might write “leaders” for newspapers. He walked over, dropped a penny into the box at the door, and was soon busy examining the tone and spirit of the Edinburgh papers. One, he thought, would suit him, or rather he would suit it. Its sentiments were liberal, if not democratic; and he longed to have a hit at the vices and conventionalisms of the aristocracy, from whose absurd notions he had suffered so severely, and was, at the moment, enduring, in their worst consequences.

He hastened home to write, for to-morrow was publishing day. He began. His indignant thoughts came thick and fast, though, before they flowed from the point of his pen, they assumed—wrathful as they were—elegance of style. He finished it, and rushed to the printing-office.

"Can I see the Editor?" he inquired of a compositor whom he met at the door.

"I doubt it," was the reply. "This is publication night, and he is very busy."

"I have an article for to-morrow's paper."

"Oh, in that case, you had better try and gain admittance. There is the door of his room."

William advanced, and knocked.

"Come in," shouted a voice from within.

Easier said than done, however—the door would not open.

"Oh, I forgot it was fastened," murmured the voice from the interior, and the sound of some one rising from a seat was heard. Presently the door was opened, and Ainslie stood face to face with the great man—the invisible "we."

"The Editor, I presume," said William.

"The same, sir, at your service, only dreadfully busy," was the polite and plain rejoinder.

"I have taken the liberty of calling with a leader for to-morrow's paper."

"Ha! a leader! What sort of a leader?" said the "we," with great animation; "I'm just in want of one, having had no time to write myself to-day. But what is its tone?—liberal, I hope, for nothing else will do with me."

"You had better glance it over," observed Ainslie, quietly handing him the manuscript.

The Editor took it. As it was written in a very plain

hand, he read it with ease, emitting an exclamation of approval at every two or three sentences.

"Bravo!—that's the sort of thing," he said, when he had finished its perusal. "May I know to whom I am indebted for this excellent article?"

"I have no wish to make my name known, sir," replied William, with dignity, yet with perfect politeness. "The fact is, I am at present in pecuniary straits, and thought I might earn a little in this way."

"Could you let me have an article in this style for every paper?" inquired the Editor, kindly.

"I would try," was William's modest answer.

"Well, I am sure the proprietors would willingly give you five shillings a-piece for them. Will this suffice?"

"It will."

"Then I may count upon you."

"You may."

"From that publication onwards, for many weeks, the readers of the —— were favoured with a thundering "political," which was admired exceedingly, and which increased the circulation to a considerable extent. The paper for *Chambers's Journal* was also accepted, and others from the same pen solicited; so that, during the winter months, William had employment and remuneration equal to his wants. Still he searched for Jessie, wandering up and down streets and closes in the hope of discovering her.

One evening in spring, he was rambling disconsolately in the High Street, when some one tapped him on the shoulder. Looking round, he found a tall, bushy-whiskered man at his elbow.

"You are seeking Jessie Melville?" said the stranger, in a low, impressive voice.

"Yes; can you tell me anything of her?" said William, with intense eagerness.

"I am happy to say I can—will you please to follow me?"

"May I trust you?"

"I think you may," returned the stranger, turning on Ainslie a round, good-humoured countenance.

William looked earnestly into it for a few moments, then said, unhesitatingly,

"Lead on; I will follow you."

CHAPTER XXII.

RE-UNION.

WHEN the stranger touched William Ainslie on the shoulder, and whispered in his ear the thrilling words recorded at the close of last Chapter, he was standing near the arched entrance to Blackfriars' Wynd. When, however, in obedience to his words and gesture, the unknown led the way to where Jessie was either to be seen or heard of, he went straight up the High Street, William following a few paces behind him. The young man scanned, as narrowly as the decreasing light and his own agitation would let him, the form and appearance of his strange accoster. He was a stout, burly, rough-looking fellow, free and careless in his gait, with broad shoulders and brawny limbs, though Ainslie thought he had a slight halt or trail in one of his legs. Big and stout as he was, however, his appearance was not calculated to produce much alarm, or inspire in any mind a feeling of fear. Good nature, and a harmless disposition, oozed out at every point of his huge body—from the eye that lay indolent in a bed of fat, to the arm, buried nearly to the elbow in his ample coat pocket. A phrenologist, or physiognomist, would have told you at a glance, that of the four temperaments which, it is contended, go to make up man's physical and mental characteristics, and act in harmony with his cerebral organs, the lymphatic

was greatly in the ascendant. He by no means looked like an overworked man, or one who liked to exert himself much; but it seemed as if the Castle of Indolence had been his past abode, and its ease and indulgence his perpetual enjoyment.

It was, therefore, with little apprehension of personal danger that Ainslie went with the stranger; and even, when he turned into the mouth of a close, a little above the Tron Church, he hesitated not to follow him, though it was one of the darkest and narrowest in the district. Down its greasy slope strode the tall man, his arms nearly touching the wall on both sides; and after him walked William, his heart beating wildly with eager expectation. About the middle of the close the leader paused, and, after silently motioning with his finger, entered a door-way, dark as night, and began ascending the turnpike stair within. Still Ainslie kept at his heels; and when he at length opened the door at the very top, he was close behind him. In they went, into a large kitchen, where a woman was toasting bread, apparently for tea. No gas nor candle was lighted, but a bright fire burned in the grate, and by its ruddy glow every object in the apartment was visible.

"Now, sir," said the tall man, breaking the silence for the first time, "if you will ascend to the room above, you will, in a little time, receive some tidings of her you seek. You are not afraid?" he continued, seeing Ainslie hesitate.

"No," returned the latter: "but don't you go with me?"

"I will show you the way," said the man; and his voice was low, and, as Ainslie thought, tremulous with excitement—excitement not of an angry or sinister kind, but caused by deep, nay, joyful feeling.

"This way, sir," he resumed, going to a door at the far

end of the kitchen. "It is very dark, but I trust you will feel your way up the steps; or stay, I will go first, and open the door above."

And with light steps the stranger ascended the wooden stair, leading William by the hand. When they reached the landing place, a door was opened, Ainslie was pushed into an apartment, and the door again suddenly shut upon him.

"Confound it! am I betrayed after all?" thought he, as he heard the latch forcibly closed.

He looked round to see into what kind of a place he had been so unceremoniously introduced—but a gray darkness prevailed, and he could discern nothing distinctly. There was a fire in the room, but it burned dim; and the light of day, which, even in the open street, was now very faint, was nearly withdrawn from the narrow windows above.

He thought he heard a slight rustle in one corner of the room, as if some one had risen from a seat in alarm; and he approached in the direction of the sound.

"Who is there?" said a lady's voice, in tones which sent a thrill to William's heart, and bound him with a spell.

There was a few moments silence, during which the breathing of both was audible, and again the same question was put in tones of greater terror than before.

"Jessie!" faltered William, with doubting joy.

The voice was greatly disguised by emotion, but the quick, true ear of love detected it, and with a cry which none may describe, and none may imitate, she rushed forward into the outstretched arms open to receive her.

Who may tell the ecstasy of that moment? Into its duration were gathered the joys of many hours, the concentrated delight of long-deferred communion, the sudden and unexpected meeting of sundered loving hearts.

For a minute no word was spoken, but sobs of deepest joy rose on the silence of that sacred room. Locked in a firm embrace, they could only lay heart to heart, and feel the quick unutterable throbbing of each. Speech was impossible and unnecessary. No words could have even faintly expressed the feelings that swelled in their bosoms. Silence and tears were the only adequate language of the moment, the only fit signs to shadow forth the unfathomable joy within.

"O, is this not a dream?" exclaimed William, at length. "Do I indeed hold my own Jessie in my arms once more? Speak, dearest, speak again, and assure me it is no freak of the imagination."

"No dream, dear William, no dream, but a blessed reality," returned the weeping girl, nestling yet closer in his bosom.

"Father, I thank Thee," murmured William, straining her again in an impassioned embrace.

"But how came you hither?" she inquired wonderingly. "Have you seen Joe?"

"I don't know," he replied. "I was wandering just now in the High Street, when a tall man suddenly touched me, and asked me to follow him, saying I would hear news of you. He led me down the close, up the long stair, and finally thrust me into this room. But whoever he is, he's a capital fellow, and I must thank him for the exquisite enjoyment he has given me."

"It must have been Joe," returned Jessie. "He has been seeking you for some days."

"But who is Joe?" inquired her lover.

"O, you will know all by-and-by; but, first of all, we must have a light. Let me go and light the gas."

"Ay, do," said William, releasing her, "and let me see

how you are looking. I long to gaze on your lovely face once more."

"Nay, if you are going to flatter me, I shall keep you in darkness still," she answered, as she turned on the gas, only so far, that when she applied the match, it gave but a peeping light.

He approached, however, behind her, and screwed it to the full, when its strong glare leapt up with an illuminating flash, and revealed her bright, animated countenance, shining through laughing tears.

From the ardent burning gaze of her lover she was fain to take shelter, and nowhere seemed so inviting as his own manly breast. Here she again hid her face, and he bent over her with yearning tenderness.

A faint hesitating knock at the door startled them. "Come in," exclaimed Jessie, raising herself, but not quitting his arms.

The door opened slowly, and the broad, good-natured face of Joe made its appearance, brown and ruddy, like the setting sun.

"Come forward, Joe," said Jessie, kindly. "Let me introduce you to Mr Ainslie as a true friend of both of us. William," she said, turning to the latter, "this is Joe Stewart, to whom we are a great deal indebted, much more than you have any idea of; but the whole you will soon learn."

"Give me your hand, my honest fellow," said Ainslie, approaching Joe, and grasping his huge palm. "There, tell me how I can repay you for the kindness and important service Miss Melville speaks of?"

"By saying nothing about it, and forgiving me for the rest," returned Joe, with gratified respect, and absolutely blushing at William's warmth.

"Forgive you? what am I to forgive you for?" asked Ainslie, in astonishment.

"Much, very much," answered Joe, with emotion; "more, I am afraid, than you will ever overlook."

"There now, Joe, don't go on magnifying your offence in that way," said Jessie, gaily. "Were it ten times greater than it is, I would intercede for you, and I flatter myself I will make a good advocate. Won't I, William?" she continued, turning with a smiling countenance to Ainslie.

"No doubt of it," said he, fondly; then turning to Joe, he added; "Whatever may be the charge against you, I assure you of my entire forgiveness. Your offence is all atoned for by the service you have rendered this afternoon. The meeting you have procured for us must cancel all former transgressions against us."

"Now, you hear that," said Jessie; "Mr Ainslie has quite forgiven you; though, after all, when he knows everything, I am sure he will be more inclined to thank than to pardon."

"Blessings on her," blubbered Joe, now fairly crying for joy; "she's an angel sent to earth by mistake."

"Nay, not by mistake," returned Jessie, who overheard the remark, and replied to it with a serious gaiety. "I have got a mission to accomplish, and part of it is to bring you to heaven along with me. Won't you go?"

"Anywhere; I will go anywhere with you," said Joe, fervently. "I will gladly spend my life in your service, if you will but allow me to follow you and attend you. I will——"

"There, there, say no more," interrupted Jessie, laughing, "else you will make Mr Ainslie jealous. Are we going to have tea soon?"

"That is just what I came to ask about. We have been getting it ready in the kitchen since ever Mr Ainslie came; and the old woman tells me everything is prepared."

"Have you got any for me, Joe?" asked William, glancing towards Jessie for her approval.

"Yes, sir," answered Joe, with a cheerful laugh. "I thought you might like to take it together; so I toasted bread for two, and the mistress put a teaspoonful more tea into the teapot."

"That's right, my fine fellow," exclaimed William, who had by this time seen Jessie's look of acquiescence. "Shall I come and give you a hand up with it?"

"O no, sir; me and the old woman will have it on the table in a trice."

Saying which, Joe stumped nimbly down stairs, and soon returned with the teapot in one hand, and a large jug of hot water in the other, followed by the female bearing a tea equipage for two. This was soon placed in due order upon the table, and the bearers withdrew, leaving the young folks to take the meal alone. William placed a chair at the top of the table, where the tray stood, and handed Jessie to it with mock formality, himself assuming a seat at the opposite side, and looking over to his companion with a look of beaming satisfaction.

Jessie, her face glowing with pleasure, proceeded with alacrity to perform the duties of her office.

"This reminds me of old times," said William; "of our first meetings in the little room in the Canongate close."

"Ah, how many changes have taken place since then!" returned Jessie, sadly.

"Changes indeed," continued William. "Then we were free and happy, for no shadow had darkened our love; no

trial, no sacrifice, no injustice had come with its coldness, its difficulty, or its cruelty, to mar our prospects, and destroy our joy. May we not hope, however, that these, or, at least, much of these trials—and the heaviest of them—are past? In spite of wrong and unnatural villany, shall we not now be irrevocably united, and live, at least, in humble content, though obscure and unknown, yet happy, and devoted to each other?"

"Let us not speak of that yet," remarked Jessie, handing him a cup of tea, and nearly spilling it in her excitement. "We have a great many things to discuss before that point comes for consideration—much, very much, to tell each other and to arrange."

"Ah, true; but, in my happiness, I have yet been unable to ask a thousand things which I long to know concerning your capture and residence here, or wherever else you have been. I know so much," he added, while a dark shade came over his brow; "I know that it was by my father's orders the atrocious deed was executed, but further than this I am entirely ignorant. Pray enlighten me."

"Let us have tea over first, and our seats drawn near the fire," said Jessie, with a smile; "and we can then have a long, uninterrupted chat about many things, unless, indeed, you are engaged somewhere else."

"No, indeed," replied Ainslie; "fortunately, this is not publication night."

"Publication night!" echoed Jessie, with a surprised look.

"Yes. Ah! you are wondering at that; but I have got a tale to tell too, partly painful and partly not. By-the-by, I think I see some numbers of *Chambers's* lying on that table over there. Do you see it sometimes?"

"I get it regularly."

"And do you read it all?"

"Every word."

"How do you like the article in last Saturday's, entitled '———?'"

"O, it is delightful. Every sentence thrilled to my very soul; it is so true to nature, truth, and beauty. Did you not like it?"

"Well, I thought it might have been better."

"Fastidious man," returned Jessie, shaking her head. "I fear you are more difficult to please than you used to be. We two used to agree most completely. Now, I thought it charming."

"I am delighted to hear it. But don't praise it any more, else I shall get too proud."

"What! the article is yours then?" she exclaimed, looking at him in amazement. "And yet, why should I wonder; I have heard you utter the same beautiful sentiments long ago. The wonder is that I did not recognise it as yours; but the idea of you writing for any periodical never struck me."

"Writing has been my trade for these last six months," answered he, with a half-sad, half-pleasant smile.

"Have you been in Edinburgh all that time?" she inquired.

"I have. My father and I quarreled about your abduction, and ever since I have had to rely upon myself, for I resolved to leave the roof of one who had behaved so shamefully and unjustly."

"And you really made this sacrifice for me?" said Jessie, while her face beamed with gratitude and affection.

"Nay, nay, you are not the person to talk of sacrifice," replied he, with a sad, serious smile, "since you made one

of —; but we must not talk of this now," he continued, seeing the shadow of distress pass over her face. "Come, tea is finished, I suppose, let us draw to the fire, and recount our half-year's adventures. There now, we are comfortably seated. Do you narrate first, as yours must be by far the most interesting. So, dearest, begin."

And there, in front of a bright fire, with their chairs close together, and William's arm encircling Jessie's waist, did they tell to each other the personal incidents of their period of separation—incidents which, as they are already known to the reader, we need not recapitulate.

As William listened to her story, he became extremely interested in Joe, readily forgave his share in the business, since he saw that a defective education, or rather unjust treatment, and not natural wickedness, had led him to become the tool of Hooker and his father. It might, he perceived, have happened much worse. A very different kind of agent might have been employed to keep Jessie prisoner—one who might have abused his power, and proved utterly relentless; in which case, the period of separation might have been indefinitely protracted, or, worse still, never terminated but with death. Instead of this, however, the jailer had, by Jessie's instrumentality, become her friend, and by his aid their plans and wishes might be accomplished. Joe was, therefore, raised to a hero in Ainslie's eyes; though, if he had known all, he would have been inclined still more to admire him. But of the will Jessie said nothing, preferring to produce it on another occasion—an occasion which she felt sure would duly come. That, and the revelation of her birth, she had resolved to make together, when the law of man as well as that of God would prevent their further separation.

Hours of sorrow and enjoyment alike come to a close. This glorious evening of re-union passed far too quickly away, and long ere the half of what the lovers had to say to each other was spoken, or before plans for the future could be discussed, they were startled to hear a very late hour tolled from the High Church clock.

"Hark ! do you hear that, William ? Now, I must really bid you go," said Jessie, laughing. "Prisoners' visitors are not allowed to stay so late. Besides, to-morrow is a new day, you know."

He rose at once, and, with a tender embrace, they parted — parted in every different circumstances, and with far happier prospects, than once before at the same hour, when they bade each other farewell, and he was left bowed down by the side of the area railings. The cloud is dispersing : its silver lining fast appears ; may we not hope that soon it will disappear on the far horizon, and be succeeded by calm, serene, perpetual sunshine !

CHAPTER XXIII.

LOVE AND HAPPINESS.

THE days immediately succeeding the re-union of the two lovers were spent very happily in tender intercourse, and in making arrangements for the future. In the first flush of his joy and ardour, William pressed an immediate marriage, and Jessie's removal from the place where she had been so long confined. But the prudent girl, though equally strong in her affections, and ready, with all frankness and willingness, to become his wife, opposed both of these plans, and on grounds so proper and preferable, that William soon yielded a ready acquiescence. It wanted yet five months till the anniversary of Grace's death, and Jessie concluded that it would be very unseemly to have their marriage celebrated before that time. Thus far did she deem it right to yield to the world and its ideas. The understood rule, which placed at least a year between the presence of a first and second wife in a husband's home, was one of the regulations in social life which she admired. It constituted, in her eyes, a tribute of respect and affection to the memory of the loved and lost, which appeared beautiful and appropriate; and though, in the present case, there had been peculiar circumstances, which might have rendered a departure from the usual course quite justifiable, yet the world knew not of these—and she had no wish that it should

—and therefore, in its eyes, an earlier marriage between the two would have seemed indicative of unseemly haste.

This was, therefore, agreed on—to put off their union till August; but the next thing to settle, was how to dispose of themselves in the long interval. The secured friendship of Joe, of course, left them free to go where they pleased; but it was of importance that the Baronet and Hooker should remain entirely ignorant of the change of affairs till the marriage was over, and, if Jessie left her present abode, this advantage might be lost. An earlier knowledge, on their part, might lead them to devise new schemes to prevent it—schemes which might prove more successful than that they had just defeated, and this William shuddered even to think of. Jessie, on her side, had even stronger, at least additional—reasons for keeping them in the dark till she became a wife; and these the reader knows, as he will remember that her original resolution, not to reveal her birth beforehand, either to William or her parents, was to be sacredly adhered to by her. Anything, therefore, that might prevent the union, not only hindered the consummation of her happiness, but kept many other matters in an unfortunate position.

In settling this second point, however, it was deemed advisable to call Joe into council, since his co-operation was requisite. So William went to the top of the stair and called him.

“Coming, sir,” exclaimed Joe, briskly; and in a moment or two he entered the apartment.

“Come forward to the fire, Joe,” said William, kindly. “We are making up plans for the future, and want you to help us.”

“With all my heart,” returned Joe, with alacrity. “No-

thing will give me greater delight than to serve Miss — Melville.

"Really, Joe, you will make me jealous," said William, with a comical smile. "Won't you serve me as well as Miss Melville?"

"Right willingly sir," replied Joe. "But you know, sir, my debt of gratitude is largest to Miss Melville; and," he added, with a sly look, "I know I cannot serve her without serving you."

"Capital," cried William; "you have got out of the difficulty in grand style. You would do well at court, Joe."

"Would I, sir?" asked Joe, with an innocent and puzzled look.

"Yes," returned the other, while Jessie sat highly amused. Good diplomatists are sure to succeed there. But let us proceed to business. Sit down, Joe, in that chair by the fire."

"Well, I had rather stand, sir, or sit back here. I don't like to occupy such an equal position as that."

"Nonsense," exclaimed William, taking him by the shoulders and seating him in the chair first indicated, where his usual ease and freedom of manner soon returned to him; though it must be remarked that, since his illness, he never appeared in Jessie's presence without manifesting an air of deep respect, mingled with grateful admiration.

"You must know," said William, opening the conference, "that we have resolved to put off our marriage till August. Now, we are rather at a loss to know how to proceed till that time. It would never do, of course, to let Hooker know what has occurred. We must, therefore, take steps to prevent any knowledge whatever from reaching him."

"Certainly; if you don't intend doing anything previous to the marriage," said Joe, looking to Jessie doubtfully.

"Nothing can be done before that time," said Jessie, hastily, giving Joe, at the same time, a significant look in return.

"Then, in that case, our plan is to keep all dark. Yet," continued Joe, hesitatingly, "I cannot understand why—why——"

"What cannot you understand, Joe?" asked Ainslie, seeing his confusion.

"Why, if I must say it," returned Joe, with a laugh, "I cannot understand why you are going to defer the marriage so long. If it had been me, I know I should have had it over immediately."

"You forget, Joe, that it is little more than seven months since my wife died," said William, gravely. "Now, it is common, in such cases, to let at least a year elapse; and this is what Je——, I mean Miss Melville, wishes."

"Then there is no doubt but it is right, if she wishes it," said Joe, now thoroughly reconciled to the delay. "Only, this is not what every one does. I know a man in Leith, whose wife died on the Sunday—she was buried on Wednesday—Friday was his wedding-day—and on the Sunday following he was churched for both."

"Rather quick work that," said William, laughing. "That is what I call taking time by the forelock. But, however, as I have said, we mean to do differently. Now, it will be as well to let matters go on, as at present. When is your salary due?"

"Quarter-day comes round in a month," replied Joe, with a chuckle.

"And where do you draw the money?"

"At the —— Bank, in St Andrew Square."

"Then you had better draw it at the time, as usual. But are you sure that Hooker has no spy set to watch you?"

"No fear of that," returned Joe. "He will never dream that I have gone over to the other party. Besides, he does not even know where we are now; and, as I happen to know that he pockets a large share of what Sir William pays, it is not likely that he will be at the trouble of coming to me—he will be glad enough, I daresay, if I don't go to him."

"Then he would not even know if Miss Melville was to leave this house altogether," said William.

"No," replied the other; "only, if she was to be recognised anywhere, it might come to their ears in that way."

"O, I would rather remain here," said Jessie. "I have come to like this room now, and we have not very long to wait."

"But the confinement, dearest? you will suffer from that," said her lover, anxiously. "Now that the fine weather is coming in, you must wish to get out at times to breathe the fresh air."

"May we not manage this for an hour at night?" she asked. "When the gloaming comes over the earth, no one will notice us, and we are not very far from the Meadows here."

"We must try it," replied William; "for it will never do to keep you moped up here, in a close, unwholesome atmosphere, when the fragrant summer air plays everywhere about."

"But what about the money?" asked Joe. "I cannot think of drawing it for myself, as I have done; besides, I have no use for so much."

"Just use it in making everything comfortable," answered William.

"Nay, everything is comfortable enough," said Jessie, "Just save as much as you can, Joe; it will be serviceable to you afterwards."

"I have it!" exclaimed Joe, while a bright smile rested on his face. "We'll keep it for the wedding."

And so the matter was settled to the satisfaction of all three.

One thing more, however, troubled Jessie—viz., Grace's will. She doubted whether it was right to withhold the knowledge of it from William for five months longer. And yet, she reflected, that the same reasons existed for its suppression till that time, even by him, which existed for entire silence as to their plans and intentions. Were it put into his hand immediately, he, she was assured, could do nothing with it till their union was effected; and, viewing the matter in this light, she thought no harm would be done by reserving it for an after surprise. Joe, whom she consulted in the matter, was of the same opinion; and, finally, after much deliberation, this was the course she resolved to adopt.

And now succeeded many weeks of sweet, delightful communion—the happiest, perhaps, which the lovers had known since they became acquainted. Secluded from all the world, yet free to meet each other uninterruptedly, their hearts became knitted yet more closely together; their beings blended almost into one; the flame of their affection burned bright and clear in all its purity—yea, their existence seemed like some fabled fairy dream. The river of their love flowed smoothly in its course. At its first rise, indeed, it gushed gloriously forth, and promised fair to flow nobly and serenely

forward; but soon rocks and crags came in its way. The waters grew turbulent and troubled. Still rougher and rockier grew its channel and its banks. Hideous precipices, yawning ravines, black gorges, deep dark glens, lined its way; and at last came suddenly a dark fearful abyss, down which it hopelessly plunged, and, as it was deemed, to be lost for ever. But not so. After a time it re-appeared, though still amid solitude and gloom, and overhung by thick masses of underwood. Suddenly these ceased, and it emerged into light and sunshine, and now flows on in a smooth unruffled bed—illuminated by day with the golden sunbeams, and shone upon by night by all the smiling hosts of heaven.

O, happy is it when thus life's current reaches a peaceful flow, after dashing turbulently and tempestuously along adverse paths—over rocky temptations, between trial-towering precipices, down faith-testing glens, and hope-destroying chasms! How very welcome is the succeeding tranquillity! With what satisfaction of soul are the past dangers and difficulties gazed upon by the escaped and triumphant voyagers! The present rest is sweet, but doubly sweet because of former trouble and turmoil. Long endurance and resistance is now crowned by success, and rewarded with repose; and amid its dreamy delight, the experience of the past adds tenfold to the joy of the present.

And never, never, does peace and happiness fail to follow life's well-fought battle. Take this for your comfort, O ye tempest-tossed sons and daughters of earth. Be strong, be courageous, resist, endure, fight manfully, courageously, heroically, yield not, flinch not, and in due time you shall triumph. Yes, you *shall* triumph, if your faith fail not: if duty is done—if trial is borne—sooner or later the time of repose and reward will arrive. It may not be in the battle-

field itself—it may not be, as in the present instance, on this side time and the grave. The scene of conflict does not always become the scene of conquest and recompense. But there is another scene beyond the present—another world shall surely follow this, and *there* you are certain of reward. Struggle on then, ye brave, buffeted ones: keep your eyes steadily fixed on the shining goal, and your feet firmly planted in the path of duty, and the issue shall at last be sublime and glorious. Reason and revelation alike exclaim, with rapt conviction, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

Rapidly passed away the warm summer months, and the 15th of August—the day of union—at length arrived. The marriage was celebrated in a very quiet, unostentatious manner, as the tastes of the parties and the circumstances in which they were placed alike prompted and required. About five o'clock in the afternoon—and a beautiful afternoon it was—Joe and his female companion, together with the young couple, proceeded to the residence of a minister in the south side of the town—the former two as witnesses of the ceremony. In one short hour the happy event was consummated—that act was done which Sir William Ainslie had striven so desperately to prevent—and Jessie and William were made man and wife. The feelings which glowed in the bosom of each, as they heard the words which cemented the holy relation, were intensely thrilling, yet calm and dignified. The fierce fires of passion burned not in their breasts; love with them had, from the first, assumed a lofty character—a character more befitting its high nature, than it is too often, alas! made to wear among the sons of men. With most, may we not say with nearly all, the feeling is highly coloured by sense, and its nobler and more heavenly.

lines dimmed and obscured thereby. Men and women, in the riotous luxuriance of youthful sensuous imagination, fail to see into the better region beyond. When they come into this holy temple to worship, it is the temple itself with which they are captivated, and not the character and attributes of the Deity, whose shrine is placed therein. Dazzled by the external attraction, they are ready to bow down and worship *that*, while the true object of reverence and adoration is undiscerned and unhonoured. With them the architectural ornaments appear to be invested with a glare which eclipses the diviner blaze of the Shechinah within. Like the Jews of old, they worship in the outer courts, and seek not to penetrate into the holy of holies, to behold its mysteries, and their transcendent meaning. But, alas! unlike the Jews, their presence without is neither compulsory nor becoming. Into this holy place, all men may, all should enter, if they would worship the Deity of the place aright. No veil of separation has been hung by Divinity between the holy and most holy place of the marriage temple. It is man himself that, by a blunted moral sensibility, has placed the thick curtain there, which prevents him from discerning the radiant glories within. In one word, the human eye, for the most part, beholds only the marriage of the body—it sees not, understands not, or, at least, but dimly and imperfectly, the deeper, grander reality, the substance of which this is but a type and a shadow—the marriage of the mind.

It was very different with William and Jessie. Their clear cultured minds penetrated into the true nature of the relationship—saw the grand serene depths of the spiritual union which the marriage tie renders possible, and is really designed to facilitate—gazed with joy and rapture on these

placid waters which fill the deeper fountains of life, the source of which is the crystal river which flows directly from the throne of God. Their thoughts passed far into the inner sanctuary of the heart—infinity beyond the region of sense—and roamed among its ennobling capacities. To them there was a beauty beyond the beauty of form, a pleasure surpassing a thousand times everything external. Through the common avenues, and apart from the common accompaniments, they reached onwards to spiritual joys—joys which alone are worthy of a true, divinely-constituted humanity.

But with Jessie herself there were thoughts and reflections of additional import. The hour had now come when she might with all honour reveal the secret of many months—the hour, too, when she could, while depriving her husband of the rank and relationship he had long enjoyed, put into his hands a title to at least as much wealth and outward comfort as that which had previously surrounded him. The effect of the communication she had to make would, she knew, be momentous in its nature, and followed by results which it was impossible to estimate. These, however, could hardly fail to be pleasant and delightful. It would open new hearts to her love, surround her by new friends who would joyfully acknowledge her, and, gathering up their affection for her by the light of the past, wherein her sublime self-sacrifices were recorded, they would accord to her at once no stinted share of kindness and approbation. The time which brought experiences like these was a time of immense importance, and added greatly even to the interest of the natural associations of the occasion.

On leaving the minister's house, they returned directly to the close in the High Street; for as yet no arrangements for

a permanent residence had been made. William had urged this on Jessie, but, strange as it appeared to him, she requested all such arrangements to be delayed till after the ceremony. He could not understand her meaning for this, but, having a strong faith in her judgment, he complied with her wish; and so it happened, that when they returned united, his room in Lothian Street, or her attic chamber, were the only places to which they could go. The latter was, of course, on many accounts, to be preferred, and to it they accordingly went.

Leaving Joe and his companion in the kitchen, William and his bride ascended the wooden stair alone. With that inherent delicacy which characterized Joe, he knew that at such a moment his presence, or the presence of any one, would be an intrusion, and he stayed below.

The pair entered the room, and closed the door—strong, almost overwhelming, emotions swelling in their breasts. They cast upon each other a look of unutterable meaning, and, without a word, fell into each other's arms.

"At last then, Jessie, you are irrevocably mine," whispered William, pressing her closely to his heart; "mine—mine—for ever mine. No one can separate us now. Our enemies have been foiled; injustice, oppression, and knavery, have been baffled; and our love crowned and consummated. Are you not happy, my dearest?"

"Supremely happy," murmured the lovely girl, gazing upon him with a fond look. "We have had some trials to endure, but we have overcome them, and are now united. I am indeed yours; but are you not also mine?"

"I am, I am; my beloved is mine, and I am hers."

"Let us be seated," said Jessie, after a pause, "and

prepare yourself for some extraordinary communications which, long ago, this hour was destined to disclose."

Ainslie looked at his bride with wonder, for on her usually calm face there appeared traces of great mental excitement. They sat down opposite each other, and Jessie drew a packet of papers from her bosom.

"Read that," she said, in a low trembling voice, handing one of them towards him.

It was Grace's will.

CHAPTER XXIV.

STRANGE NEWS.

WILLIAM looked at the paper, read its contents, then gazed on Jessie in silent bewilderment. The latter sat with a composed smile on her face, and something like the old merry twinkle in her eye.

"What is this?" at length asked her husband; "or, rather, where has it come from? for I see well enough what it is."

"You mean, how has it come into my possession?" said Jessie. "We have Joe to thank for it, since he it was who put it into my hands little more than a week before he met you in the High Street."

"But how, in all the world, did he get hold of a thing, the existence of which was never suspected?"

"I can tell you so much. Do you know that Mr Ferguson is Hooker's brother-in-law?"

"Never heard of it before."

"The relationship is, I suspect, unknown to most folks. It is true, however, and gives a clue to the motive which would induce Hooker to suppress such a document as that."

"But how could such a thing be done without detection?"

"Very easily, in the circumstances. You remember of

spending a few days with Grace at Broomfield Park immediately after your marriage?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"It was done then. Poor Grace went alone to the lawyer's office, got it drawn out, and requested entire secrecy to be maintained on the subject, desiring the lawyer to produce it in the event of her death. She had, of course, no idea that it was his interest to withhold it. The witnesses were Hooker's housekeeper, who died the following week, and Joe, who was at that time devoted to the lawyer's interests. So the thing was easily done, since Grace does not seem to have hinted of her generosity to any one."

"Why have they been so imprudent as let this will remain in existence? Why not destroy it?"

"More villany, dear William. I doubt the idea of honour among thieves is not a very sound one, though, in this case, the double dishonesty has conduced to detection. Fergusson, it seems, would not give Hooker the sum he asked, for the will. He pretended, however, to be satisfied, and gave Bob a *forged* copy, which Bob instantly destroyed, under the impression that it was the original."

"I understand," said Ainslie. "And, doubtless, he intended at some future time to extort more from Fergusson by means of the real document. But why give it to Joe?"

"This I do not know; but I suspect Joe got it by stratagem, unknown to Hooker."

"May I not ask him about it? It would be better for us to know this point exactly. It would guide me in my future proceedings."

"By all means. I think he will not hesitate to inform you all, when he knows it will serve you. There is a hand.

bell at your elbow, which he placed there yesterday for the purpose, as he said, of letting him know when we want him. Touch it, and he will soon appear."

Ainslie rung the bell, and Joe was soon before them. When he saw the will in William's hand, he turned red, half with shame, half with pleasure; for the recollection of his share, both in its former suppression and present production, came upon him.

"Here is something more for which, it seems, I am indebted to you, Joe," said Ainslie, holding up the will.

"Yes, and something more for which I must sue for forgiveness," pleaded the contrite Joe.

"Everything was forgiven before, you know," answered William, kindly. "But you would do me a great favour if you will tell me how you got this will into your possession. Did Hooker intrust you with it?"

"Not exactly," said Joe, with a broad grin.

"Then he does not know you have it?"

"I rather think not. The fact is, I left Edinburgh one night, and stole it from his office. I meant to make a personal advantage of it; but," he continued, looking at Jessie with a grateful countenance, "I see things in a different light now; and since it has been the means of getting it into the hands of the rightful owner, I do not regret the act of housebreaking and robbery."

"I am afraid none of us are in a position to estimate the exact immorality of that deed, since we are such gainers by it," returned William, laughing. "We must, however, look upon it as one of those wonderful instances in which Providence brings good out of evil. Then Hooker is entirely ignorant of the abduction of this from his office?"

"Most profoundly; unless he has since missed it."

"Which would, no doubt, put him in a pretty fever. Now let me thank you, Joe," added Ainslie, rising and warmly grasping Joe by the hand. "The past is forgotten, the happy present is alone before us; and as you have assisted so materially to bring things into such a glorious position, you are deserving of our warmest gratitude."

"Yes; let me, too, express my thanks," said Jessie, coming forward and taking his other hand. "Without your aid, we could not have been made so happy."

"I tell you I cannot stand this any longer," said Joe, sobbing like a child. "You know very well, Miss Melville—I mean Mrs Ainslie—that you are the cause of all the change in my conduct. If you had not nursed me, and taught me out of the blessed Book, I would have been cruel to you still. Thank her, sir," he added, turning to William; "thank her, sir, if you thank anybody; but don't overwhelm me with a kindness which I feel I don't deserve. There, let me go, let me go; unless you want anything else with me."

"Nothing else, Joe; but when I proceed in any way in reference to this document, will you assist me?"

"To the utmost of my power; you may rely upon that. O, I could dance for joy," exclaimed Joe, as he ran out of the room, and made his way down to the kitchen.

"Some more blessed effects of your noble conduct, my dearest Jessie," said William, embracing his bride tenderly, and kissing her blushing lips.

"But do you forgive me?" inquired she, looking up archly into his face.

"Forgive? What! are you too asking forgiveness?" he said, with a puzzled smile. "What have you been doing? what is your offence?"

"The suppression of the will for six months," replied Jessie.

"O, I never thought of that," he answered, smiling fondly over her. But I guess your motive. You wanted to make this day one of joy and surprise to me. Of course, you knew I could not use the document till our union was effected. There was, therefore, no harm whatever in keeping me in ignorance till now."

"No, dearest, that is not the whole explanation. If some other consideration had not influenced me, I would have put the will into your hands long ago. Here are more papers for you to examine; take them, and—and——"

"For Heaven's sake, Jessie, what is the matter with you? You tremble and turn pale! Say, dearest, what agitates you in this dreadful way?"

"I am foolish, dear William; but these papers will explain all. I cannot, however, remain in the room while you peruse them. Let me go to the little closet at the top of the stair, and come to me when you know all."

Saying which, she tore herself from his arms, and disappeared, closing the door behind her. He sank wonderingly into a seat, and prepared to read the papers she had thrust into his hand. The first he got hold of was a small folded slip, on which Jessie had written the words, "To be read last." He therefore laid it aside, and applied to the others. A few sentences were sufficient to claim all his attention; and, with a wild, beating heart, he perused the whole—Mrs Melville's account of the changing of the infants, and Dr Sharp's attestation of the same.

What amazement seized him, as, bit by bit, the strange story was unfolded! At first, he could reflect none upon the matter; he could not think how the fact, so solemnly stated

in the papers, affected him and Jessie personally. He could not yet come to dwell upon the reversing of their positions, and the interesting and important changes of feeling attached thereto. The story itself, with its abstract romance, filled his mind, and he could only ejaculate, "What an astounding revelation!"

Then his eye fell on the folded note, and he opened it. It contained a few lines written by Jessie, and the words were as follows :—

"My dearest William,—I cannot meet your eye after you read these papers, till I explain, by a few words, my past conduct in relation them. The revelation was made to me by Mrs Melville, at the hour of her death, and the proofs at the same time put into my possession. My resolution was to remain perfectly silent till after our union, for I was foolish enough to fear that a previous revelation might prevent it ; and, I may *now* say, dearest, without seeming too bold, I loved you too devotedly to risk this. At that time, I was ignorant of Sir William's opposition, and deemed that the period of silence would be but short ; but even when I did learn from your own lips how he felt, I did not change my intention. I knew, dear William, that you were too noble to forsake me at the imperious bidding of another, and it was so delightful to feel you standing by me, and uniting yourself with me in the face of such opposition, and while yet you thought me obscure and lowly born, that I was selfish enough to keep by the course first resolved on. Then, however, came what you are pleased to term the great sacrifice, and all hope of our union was gone. You cannot think that, after giving *you* up, I could hesitate to renounce the trifling advantage which the assertion of my birth might have brought me. This, I considered, was involved in the other, and I cheerfully resolved to bear it. But God, in his providence, saw fit to render our union again possible ; that has this day been effected, and, with

much anxiety and trembling, I put the papers into your hand. Come, as soon as you can, and tell your mind on these strange things to your devoted

JESSIE."

"Matchless, matchless girl," exclaimed William, when he had read these words, and comprehended the full extent of her noble conduct; "O, how have I deserved such a treasure as thou? where, over the wide world, is thine equal to be found? Come to thee, yes, and fold thee to my heart with a worshipping love."

So saying, he rushed out of the room.

The place to which Jessie had betaken herself was a closet on the stair-head—a small room, which, as it had a window in the roof, she had neatly furnished, and often made it the place of devotion and meditation. Here she ran, after giving William the papers, and threw herself on a couch in a state of great agitation. As minute after minute passed away, her anxiety increased—nay, almost became intolerable. At length she heard him coming, and the next moment felt herself pressed to his heart.

In that close, fervent pressure she learned much. It conveyed love, admiration, fondness of the strongest kind, and she was satisfied. So much, indeed, was William overcome, that he could not speak, and in a minute he released her, and sunk down upon the couch, where he hid his face in his hands, and gave way to a burst of tears.

"My poor William, have I grieved you?" said Jessie, passing her hand with gentle fondness through his luxuriant tresses. "O, tell me, have I done wrong in giving you these papers; rather, a thousand times rather, would I have burnt them, than caused you pain by knowing their contents."

"Hush, Jessie, hush!" said her husband, in a choked

voice; "it is joy not grief, that now unmans me—joy to think I am the husband of such a being as thou art. O, Jessie, what would the world say if it knew the double sacrifice thou hast made? It would not believe it. It would say that one such as thou is not to be found on its surface—that human nature is not equal to the deeds thou hast done—that nowhere but in fiction are they to be met with—that——"

"Fiction, my dear William, can never exceed truth, if it seeks but to describe such acts—such sacrifices, if you will—as I have performed. The world must not know the strength of human love, if it cannot credit the history of ours. But it is enough for me to know that you are satisfied."

"Satisfied! O, Jessie, I am more than satisfied—I am overwhelmed with joy and delight. My——"

"Stop, stop, or you will make me too vain," cried Jessie, putting her hand playfully on his mouth. "Come now, let us deliberate. No arrangements have been made for our residence, and you now know the reason why I put such matters off; but it is all the more needful now that we fix on our course. What would you advise?"

"To go at once to Broomfield Park, and declare the truth?" said William, unhesitatingly. "Sir William will have no cause now to slight you. Indeed, I tremble for his self-reproaches, when he knows you are his daughter. But he must know it, and that immediately. Not a day must be allowed to elapse ere the disclosure is made. O, how exquisite will be the delight of my mother, —I mean Lady Ainslie."

He paused, for the recollection that he could no longer call the amiable lady his mother came over him for the

first time, and it brought with it a pang. Jessie saw his pain and its cause in a moment, and hastened to remove it as far as she could.

"Yes, call her mother still; for is she *not* still your mother, my own William?" she exclaimed, twining her arms round his neck, and fondly kissing his brow. The words and the act restored him to composure.

"How instinctive is a mother's feelings!" said William. "From the very first she loved you."

"I knew it; I saw it all along; and O, how it cheered me! Her tender hand smoothed for me the path of suffering and trial—her kindness divested it of half its difficulties."

"And now you will be both rewarded; yea, and I too will rejoice to place you in her arms, and tell her you are her own child—that we are now both her children."

"Might it not be as well to send the papers, and wait a reply?" asked Jessie.

"Never, my dear girl. Let us go at once and proclaim the truth. In a matter like this we must be bold and energetic. But do not fear; I will support you. We will face *your* father, and cause him to repent of his past conduct. O, he deserves it, Jessie. He richly deserves to be humbled and made ashamed. His treatment of you was beyond all endurance; and, I confess, not the least part of my anticipated pleasure is caused by the expected sight of his subdued pride, his regret and remorse—nay, chide me if you will. I hope it is more, however," he added, seriously, "the destruction of the honour-destroying principles he holds that I desire, than the humiliation of a fellow-creature."

"Nay, but be gentle with his feelings, dearest. Remember he is *our* father."

"I will, I will; fear it not. But now, about this other

business—this villanous affair of Fergusson and Hooker. We must take the Grange in our way, and give Mr Bob warning to quit.

“You do not mean to deal very hard with him, do you? For my sake spare him,” pleaded the gentle-hearted girl.

“I hardly see how that can be done,” replied William. “Such villany cannot pass unpunished; but we will see,” he added, smiling, “how they brave detection, and, if very penitent, I may be merciful.”

“But you will not go to the Grange alone?” she asked, anxiously.

“O, there is nothing to fear. Convicted guilt is never very audacious. However, I will have Joe near, and you will remain at the inn till we return. Have you fortitude enough for this?”

“I will try,” she replied, with a faint smile; “but you will not stay long?”

“Not a moment longer than is necessary, for we must afterwards post on to Broomfield Park.”

“What a strange journey we are about to take!”

“Yes, strange for both of us; but strangest for you—going to make yourself known to your parents.”

“Tell me, William,” asked Jessie, tenderly, laying one arm on his shoulder, and gazing earnestly into the shining depths of his dark eyes, “tell me, do you feel very sad in being told that your parents are not those titled ones you have always called such, and loved as such?”

“I feel it strange and startling, but, in the circumstances, little more. For mere birth and social rank you know I never cared—preferring to estimate men by a very different, and, as I believe, far more correct standard. I, however, love Lady Ainslie—dearly, devotedly love her, and might have felt

the thought that she is not my mother hard to bear; but when I find that she whom I love most of all, is the rightful occupant of the position I have so long falsely held, the change of circumstances is a joyful one to me. Looking back on all that has occurred since we first knew each other, I am proud to think that such nobility of soul belongs to what is called high birth. The aristocracy, I can tell you, cannot afford to lose that honour which your membership confers upon them?’

“Ah, but you forget—they are losing more than they gain. You now, with all your manly greatness, belong to ‘the people.’”

“And I glory in the position. ’Tis from hence the genius, the worth, the towering intelligence of our country has sprung, and I desire no better fate than to be a worthy member of this great human family!”

“Now I am satisfied,” replied Jessie. “I could not divest myself of the thought that the disclosure of the truth was to injure you; but your words have set me at rest. Your true sphere of existence is far above, and totally independent of social position. Like the eagle, you are soaring high in the blue vault of heaven, far above the mountains and the valleys; and it matters not to you whether you were fledged on a cliff or in a cavern.”

“No; especially since I have got a mate to woo me farther sunward,” returned William, gaily.

“Flattering again,” returned Jessie, shaking her head at him.

“No! only painting from the life. But, hark! here is Joe on the stair. Supper must be ready, I suppose. Come let us to the other room.

Leaving the closet, they encountered Joe at the stair-head.

"Shall we bring up the salmon?" inquired Joe, with a smile.

"Not just yet: we have to consult with you a little more. Come away into the room," said William, motioning Joe to follow them.

"It will be necessary to make Joe acquainted with this latter piece of strange news," said Ainslie, looking to Jessie.

Jessie smiled, looked to Joe, but said nothing.

"Wonders follow wonders, with us to-day, Joe," continued William. "It seems my name is not Ainslie, but Melville. . . . Why, you don't look a bit astonished."

"My astonishment was over long ago, sir," when I knew it first.

"Knew it first!" echoed William, eyeing him with astonishment.

"Yes, William," interrupted Jessie; "Joe was intrusted with the secret some time since."

"Intrusted with it? No, I stole it, you mean," cried Joe, with honest veracity. "I learned that Miss Melville had papers concealed in her breast, and got hold of them—at least the old woman did—one night while she slept. I was cruel enough to boast of my knowledge next day, and threaten to carry the papers to Sir William. I never saw her angry but that once; but such a lecture I never heard. I had a glass in my hand that night, and mockingly held up the papers in my hand. She endeavoured to get them from me. I went back, and back, and back, till I fell down the stair. It was then my leg was broken."

"Never mind, Joe," said Jessie; "it was this that led to the happy change in our position. If you can afford to give your broken leg for it, we can afford all the rest."

"That was the greatest blessing that ever happened me," returned Joe, vehemently.

"Then, at this rate, I need explain nothing," said William. "I have only to acquaint you with my plans, and ask your assistance. Could you manage to convey a note to Hooker, sometime to-morrow, without his knowing who was the bearer?"

"I think I could," said Joe, musing a little.

"Then you had better set off in the morning. After you get this done, you must conceal yourself from all who might recognise you, and meet us the following morning at the Inn, not far from the Grange Lodge. You know the place?"

"Perfectly," said Joe, nodding intelligence.

"Now, have you any objections to accompany me to the Grange?"

"None whatever."

"O, thank you, Joe," exclaimed Jessie. "I would have been so anxious had William gone alone."

"Never fear," answered Joe, determinedly. "If they dare to be insolent, we'll manage them, I dare say."

"But you will be prudent?"

"O yes, very prudent," laughed Joe, and looked to Ainslie. William laughed too, for he comprehended Joe's meaning.

"Then, if the business is all settled," added Joe, "we had better get the salmon on the table. It's a prime one, and in first-rate order; for my old woman is a capital cook."

"That I know by experience," said Jessie; while William handed her to a chair, and exclaimed—

"Now then for supper—our wedding supper."

CHAPTER XXV.

HOOKER HOOKED.

NEXT day, Daniel Hooker was busy as ever in his office at Broomfield, though occasionally he would pause in his labours, and relapse into reflection, putting 'on a kind of puzzled air, as if at a loss to know the meaning of what he was thinking about. And neither did he. Through the course of the day, he had found the following note among the letters that had been brought in; and he was somewhat a loss to know who had been its writer. He could only learn that a little boy—a stranger whom no one knew—had brought it, and vanished as soon as it was delivered. Here is what the lawyer found written inside when he opened it:—

“Mr Hooker is requested to be present at the Grange on Thursday morning, the 17th, at 10 o'clock.”

Not a word more or less was to be found—no date or signature was attached, and no clue whatever could be found to indicate the sender. Hooker looked long and earnestly at the writing. He thought it was Bob's hand, but could not be sure. It was like it, certainly; but why be so laconic, so abrupt, and indefinite?

Then, for what purpose could Fergusson desire his presence at that particular hour and day? Could anything have transpired regarding the will? Many doubts had at

times crossed the lawyer's mind about this matter. He often thought that Grace must have revealed its existence to some one before she died. It was so unlikely that she would preserve a perfect silence regarding it till the very last. Such a thought as this, however, was but the natural result of guilt and fear. These two things came at times like an obscuring shadow over his keen, clear reflection, and confused it; and when, by a strong effort, he escaped from their influence, he saw the absurdity of the idea. It was plain that had any one been informed of the existence of such a document, it would have been the person directly interested. Now, as Mr Ainslie, the individual in question, had given no signs of such a knowledge, it was evident that he and every one had been left in utter ignorance regarding it. No cause then, after all, to fear for the matter being brought to light. With the exception of Bob, Joe, and himself, not a soul in the world knew that such a thing had been done; and there seemed little likelihood indeed that any of these three would divulge it. Bob, in fact, was under the impression that the will was destroyed, and therefore altogether beyond the reach of detection. Besides, for his own sake, he would take care to maintain a perpetual secrecy on the subject. Joe, on the other hand, was equally bound, by selfish considerations, to be silent. Situated as he was, he was naturally bound to Hooker's interests. He knew that if he betrayed trust, the lawyer would find means to deprive him of the excellent and easy birth he held—a catastrophe so very abhorrent to Joe's nature and temperament, that he would be sure to do nothing by which it might be incurred.

Such were the thoughts that had chased each other through the subtle mind of the lawyer for the last few

months. It was strange, however, that he never desired to look at the will after he had put it away in his drawer. Guilt had at least this hold over him. He instinctively knew that the sight of the parchment would produce very unpleasant feelings in his breast, and he carefully abstained from subjecting himself to such an annoyance. The drawer in which he had laid it was that in which his oldest and unused papers lay. It was one which he had no occasion at any time to enter, so that even by accident his eye could not fall on the dreaded object. As to the possibility of its being abstracted, that never for a moment occurred to him, else he might have rummaged for it long ago.

After long and anxious thought, he came to the conclusion that Bob's note—for he assumed that it was from Bob—could have no connection with the will. It must be on some other business that he was wanted, and probably Bob was in too great a hurry to write further. Could there, he thought, be such a thing as a marriage in the wind? O ho! that was it, and he was wanted to draw out the settlement. No doubt of it. "Ah, Bob, Bob, you lucky dog, I must have a pull at you by-and-by! Not till after the wedding though; you will be even more at my mercy after that."

It was these reflections that once and again caused Hooker to lay down his pen and think, and, notwithstanding that the above was the result of his cogitations, he could not settle all that day. He was uneasy, and he knew not why. How true is it that "Conscience does make cowards of us all!"

At the appointed time the lawyer stopped, in his gig, at the principal entrance to the Grange—the same door at which Jessie had alighted when she came to wait at the young wife's death-bed.

"Is your master within?" he inquired of the groom who came to take charge of his horse.

"I don't know, sir," replied the man.

"He is at home, of course?" said Hooker.

"O yes, sir; I saw him in the garden this morning."

The lawyer went forward and gave a thundering knock at the door, which was soon opened by a bowing footman.

"Where is Mr Fergusson?" he asked of this polite functionary.

"In the drawing-room, sir," answered the latter; "shall I carry up your name?"

"Quite unnecessary; just show me the way; your master expects me."

Proceeded by this gentleman in livery, the lawyer made his way up the broad staircase, and was ushered into a splendid room, at the far end of which sat Bob, smoking a cigar.

"Ah, Hooker, my boy, glad to see you," exclaimed he, starting up when he perceived his visitor.

"Good morning, Bob—ahem!—Mr Fergusson, I mean," said Hooker, with a profound bow.

"Hang it; drop that nonsense, Dan. You know I hate ceremony, especially between you and me. It's humbug at the best, but with us it is the blackest of all shams."

"Still the old rattling style, Bob," returned the lawyer, becoming more natural in his tone—or rather more unnatural, for hypocrisy had long been Hooker's breathing element. "I thought," he continued, "that the position you have for some time held, as a country gentleman, would have caused you to be more—more——"

"More double-minded, you mean to say," added Bob, with a sneer. "No, no, I am not going to appear anything but

what I am, except in one matter, and that is calling myself a country gentleman, and owner of this estate, when I am neither the one nor the other. Now, I find it so desperate hard to keep up this false hand, that I have neither power nor heart to sham anything else. Plain Bob Fergusson I am still, and mean to be to the end of the chapter."

"Don't you think you are speaking rather loud?" whispered Hooker, looking cautiously towards the door. "Some of the servants may be within hearing."

"Tut! your cautiousness is monstrosously developed. You too, I see, are just the old man; as smooth, dangerous, and deceitful as ever. Upon my word, Dan, I wonder you don't tire of supporting a false position. Mine is neither so radical in its nature, or of such long standing as yours, and yet at times I groan to be free of it. I am little better than in a strait waistcoat, and often wish to throw it off, that I might be a free man again."

"Surely you are not serious?" said Hooker, anxiously, looking with alarm into Fergusson's face. "You would never think of——"

"O, don't be afraid," said Bob, with a loud, careless laugh. "I find my position too comfortable, as regards external things, to throw it up. I am not just such an ass as that, only I find it deucedly disagreeable to sport myself as Robert Fergusson, Esq. of the Grange, when I know what I know. It is not my nature, man; it is not my nature."

"But the position is so advantageous."

"I grant you that; and hence I shall keep it, and smother my nature as I best may."

Hooker was relieved. He had begun to think that out of sheer hatred of sham, Bob would confess the fraud to which

he had been accessory, and so involve him likewise in disgrace and ruin; but Fergusson's last words removed this fear, and he breathed freely again. He even got into a jocular strain, and said slyly to Bob—

"Then, I must suppose that my presence here to-day portends that a certain happy event is casting its shadow before?"

Bob looked at Daniel. "What happy event do you allude to?" he inquired.

"Ah, you sly dog, don't make it strange; don't be bashful."

"Bashful!" echoed Bob in amazement; "what on earth do you mean?"

"Why, matrimony to be sure."

"Bless me, Dan, have you taken leave of your wits altogether, or rather, have your wits taken leave of you?"

"And so there is nothing of the kind in the wind, then?"

"Nothing. What made you think so?"

"Why, I could not divine any reason for you requesting me to be here to-day, but your wish to get the settlement drawn out; but if I have been mistaken, there is no——"

"Why, the man is mad, after all," ejaculated Bob, who laid hold only on the first part of the sentence. "When or where did I request you to be here to-day? I have not seen you for these last six months."

"No; but you know you sent me a note yesterday?"

"I certainly did not; at least, I have no recollection of such a thing, and, I flatter myself, my memory is as good as ever."

The lawyer was confounded. He could only stare at Bob in silent bewilderment.

Bob could not stand such a blank, comical look, and he

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burst into a fit of loud laughter, in which Hooker, however, could not join.

"But will you explain yourself, man?" he at length said, when he was somewhat composed. "What kind of a note did you receive. or where is it?"

"Here," answered Daniel, drawing the note from his pocket, and handing it to Bob.

"A pretty good likeness of my hand, but not just the thing," said the latter, looking curiously at the lines. "That's not the way I make my g's nor h's. Why, Dan, you have been imitated; and yet this is not the first of April either."

"For Heaven's sake, be serious, and let us solve the mystery," said Hooker, gravely. "Some one must of necessity have sent that to me, and it must have been sent for some purpose."

"Fiddle! nothing but a frolic," answered Bob, laughing. "Some way has been trying his hand at a practical joke."

Just then, there came a thundering knock upon the front door, which caused them both to spring to their feet, and gaze at each other in terror. A bustle was heard in the hall, when one came slowly up the stair, the door opened, and William Auble appeared before them.

He closed the door behind him, and walked slowly up the room, keeping his eyes steadily fixed on the two brothers, who returned his gaze in stupefied astonishment. A shiver of terror struck both of them when he appeared within the threshold: for this was the man they had deeply feared, and they had reason to fear him.

Able walked on till he reached a table in front of the fire, where he paused, and continued to regard the others, standing on the opposite side, with a fixed gaze.

A profound silence prevailed, though the beatings of

Hooker's heart were to himself fearfully audible. Bob, too, found himself in a most uncomfortable position; and his usual *sang froid* completely deserted him.

"Mr Fergusson and Mr Hooker, I presume," said Ainalie, in a grave voice, and with a stiff bow. The others could only give a ghastly smile and a faint bow in return, for speaking was as yet out of the question.

"Gentlemen," continued William, "you doubtless did not expect my visit; but as I had business with both of you, I took the liberty of securing the meeting."

Bob had now somewhat recovered himself, and he saw the necessity of sustaining his character of host. With as firm a voice as he could command, he said—

"Mr Ainalie, though an unexpected visitor here, cannot surely consider that he is an unwelcome one. I only regret that my ignorance of the honour intended me has prevented me from making proper preparations."

"May I ask," said Hooker, who had now also regained some of his shrewdness and cunning; "may I ask if it was Mr Ainslie who sent me a note yesterday, requesting my presence here to-day at a certain hour?"

"I was the writer and sender of that note," said Ainalie, with immovable gravity. "If I mistake not, Mr Fergusson has the note in his hand at this moment."

"You are perfectly right, sir," returned Bob. "Mr Hooker was at a loss to know from whom he had received it, and he handed it to me, in order that I might, if possible, enlighten him. But this is now, of course, unnecessary, since the writer himself has appeared. If I may be permitted to say so, however, I think the construction of the note is somewhat singular. It has neither date nor signature attached."

"I know it, and did it intentionally," answered Ainslie.

"That is surely strange," observed Hooker. "If you really desired a meeting with me here, you could hardly expect to gain your object by such a very indefinite message."

"And yet your presence is a proof that my object has been gained."

"Only, because I thought it was Mr Fergusson's handwriting, and that the letter came from him," returned Hooker. "Had I not thought so, it is not likely that I would have attended to it; I am not accustomed to receive, far less to act upon, such a note as that."

"I had a reason; Mr Hooker, for withholding name and date. I had cause to think that if my name had been placed at the bottom of my note, you would not have been here to-day."

"And pray, what would have prevented me?" asked Hooker, turning very pale.

"Your conscience," was the brief but startling answer.

"My conscience, sir?" repeated the lawyer, with feigned surprise, but in faltering accents.

"Yes, sir, I repeat it," said William, with a stern, steady glance. "Your conscience tells you that you have injured me most deeply and foully; and had you known who it was that requested to meet you here to-day, you would have refused to come; for the injurer always shrinks from meeting the injured, especially when he has reason to fear that the latter is going to call him to account."

"I do not understand you, Mr Ainslie," replied Hooker, who longed, yet dreaded, to hear the extent of William's knowledge.

"You do understand me, sir, and you know you do," said William, significantly.

The lawyer's eye fell beneath his piercing gaze, and a shudder seemed to pass over his frame.

"Upon my word, Mr Ainslie," said Bob, who saw that Hooker was fast betraying himself, "you are acting in a very strange manner. If you have any definite charge to bring against Mr Hooker, do it openly and at once, so that he may be able to clear himself, as I doubt not he will. It is unfair and unmanly to confine yourself to hints, and words of hidden meaning."

"Be assured, sir," returned William, "that I shall be plain and explicit enough, both with Mr Hooker and yourself before I am done, for my charge applies to each of you; and *your* conscience, too, Mr Fergusson, must inform you of its nature."

"I must remind you that you are in my house, Mr Ainslie, and the feelings of a gentleman ought to prevent you from insulting me."

"Are you sure that, if the truth were told, the *reverse* is not the case?" remarked Ainslie.

Bob now saw that the existence of the will had somehow or other transpired; but deeming it destroyed, he thought it best to put on a brave front of defiance. He, therefore, in answer to William's last words, said haughtily—

"I must request you to withdraw, sir. I will not submit to such insolence as this. You will, therefore, leave the house immediately."

"Yes, and I think Mr Fergusson is very moderate in his demands," said Hooker, who saw Bob's drift, and was as anxious to get quit of Ainslie for the present. "Such ungentlemanly conduct deserves a severer punishment, so I think you had better take the hint and retire."

"I have no doubt you do, Mr Hooker," said Ainslie,

turning to the lawyer. "My presence here, is, I know, very distasteful to both of you, and you would feel much relieved were I to depart; but this I am not inclined to do."

"Then must I order the servants to eject you!" said Bob advancing to the bell-pull.

"You dare not," was the reply.

"And why?" asked Bob, stopping short.

"Because you know you would only be bringing witnesses to your own disgrace."

Bob looked furious, but he did not ring the bell.

"Hark you, gentleman," continued William, "since you seem determined to pretend innocence, and brave out the matter, I shall be more explicit. Plainly, then, I charge you with suppressing my late wife's will, and defrauding me of this estate."

Both his listeners were for a moment struck dumb; but both, feeling sure that no proof could be brought against them, strove to hide their terror, and appear shocked by the monstrosity of such an unjust charge. At length Bob said, with as much calmness and dignity as he could assume—

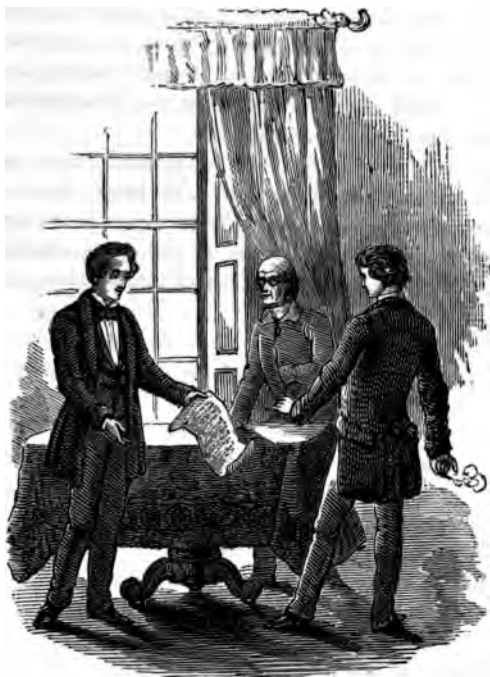
"That is a very grave charge, sir. Surely you must have proof of some kind which appears to support it."

"Don't doubt it, sir. I have ample proof," returned William, in the same slow, stern voice he had maintained throughout the whole of the conversation.

"Indeed!" returned Bob, who became alarmed at William's confident manner. He glanced at Hooker, and saw that he, too, was anxious and disturbed.

"The only proof, admissible in such a case, is the production of the will," said the lawyer.

"I know it," replied Ainslie.



"Your demand shall be complied with," said William, taking the parchment from his pocket, and unfolding it before their astonished eyes."—Page 313.

"And yet you are not prepared with it," added Bob, on the strength of a former deed—the destruction of the will by his own hands.

"You are wrong," answered William. You think that impossible. You think at this moment of a piece of parchment which you received a year ago from the gentleman opposite you, in exchange for one thousand pounds, and which you, I doubt not, destroyed. But that document was a forged one, and not the original will."

Fergusson started back as if he had received a blow, and darted an angry glance at Hooker. The latter, however, though surprised beyond measure at William's knowledge, imagining that the true will was in his own possession, resolved to maintain an indignant air of injured innocence, and said—

"Then, doubtless, you will be able to produce the original will, if you ~~want~~ this story to be believed. Pray do so at once, and let this farce come to an end."

"Yes, sir, I demand of you to do this immediately, else you will be turned out," said Bob, valiantly, when he heard Hooker's words. By the tone of his language, he saw the lawyer thought himself secure, and he waxed more bold.

"Your demand shall be complied with," said William, taking the parchment from his pocket, and unfolding it before their astonished eyes.

Hooker was literally thunder-struck. He saw at a glance that the paper Ainslie displayed was the real will, but how he could have it in his possession was a mystery. Bob, of course, did not know what to think; and he could only look to the lawyer for an explanation. In the horror and dismay which he saw depicted in Hooker's face, he learned that he had been duped; that the original document still

remained in existence, and that it was at the moment in the hands of its rightful owner. Surprise, indignation, and fear kept him dumb, so that the two villains stood before their victim in all the helplessness of convicted guilt.

William stood fronting them, cold, stern, inflexible. He saw the confusion and dismay into which he had plunged them, and after eyeing them for some time in silence, he said—

“Gentlemen, you can no longer doubt that I know all? *How* I know it, I do not deem it necessary to say. You will, however, have some idea of the steps which I shall find it necessary to take in order to secure the ends of justice.”

The first shock of surprise was now passing slowly away from Hooker's mind, and his sharp, cunning intellect was beginning to work. Had he been in any way prepared for what was coming, he would not have betrayed himself so plainly; but the utter surprise by which he had been taken, the suddenness and unexpectedness of detection, when he deemed all secure, entirely prostrated for the moment his thinking powers, and left him without a shelter or a hiding-place. His scheming brain was, however, coming again into play, and he rapidly glanced at the position in which Bob and himself were placed. He saw at once that, if they were to be saved at all, it must be by a bold stroke. The paper in Ainslie's hand was the only instrument of his power and their condemnation—could that be seized and destroyed, they would still be secure, for no other proof remained to convict them. He cast a glance of intelligence towards Bob, which the latter saw, but did not fully understand. He truly interpreted it as an intimation that the lawyer was about to do something in which he was desired to assist, but he did not know the exact nature of the act he meditated. He resolved, however, to

watch his movements, discover the drift of his intention, and assist him in the attempt, whatever it might be; for he, too, saw the desperate position in which they were placed, and was recklessly eager to escape, by whatever means.

"You cannot expect," said Hooker to Ainslie, "that we are to believe that the document you hold in your hand is the genuine will of your late wife; that can only be admitted after a careful and minute examination."

"Which you are at perfect liberty to make," answered William, handing him the parchment. "I can easily understand why you are unwilling to believe that I am possessed of it, knowing the secure place in which you deposited it. Look at it, however, and you will see that it is the original and only genuine deed."

Hooker did look at it, or rather seemed to do so, for it was only pretence. He gave another glance at Bob, but it was needless. Bob saw the object he had in view. There was a fire burning directly behind the lawyer, and before William, who was at the other side of the table, could prevent him, Hooker crumpled up the will in his hand, and thrust it between the bars of the grate. William rushed round the table, to snatch it out, but was met by Bob, who grappled with him, and kept him back. Both were powerful men, and were, at the moment, animated by the strongest motive to exert their strength. The one was struggling to prevent his ruin and disgrace, the other was striving to vindicate justice and preserve his rights; therefore they wrestled with almost superhuman fury. Fortunately, the fire was low, and the paper was difficult to ignite. Hooker blew with frantic vehemence at the black, half-burnt coals. He heard the terrible scuffle behind, but was too intent on his aim to take part. He was down on his knees, puffing

like a pair of bellows, his eyes nearly starting out of his head with excitement and anxiety, and his sharp face red almost to bursting. To his joy he saw a flame start up in the heart of the coals, and approach the paper. A moment more, and it would be in a blaze, when a hand seized him from behind with terrific violence, and he was hurled among the feet of the wrestlers. He came with such a shock against Bob's shins, that the latter fell with violence on the prostrate lawyer, and dragged William down above him.

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared a voice near them, and, looking up, they beheld Joe standing on the hearth, brandishing the rescued will in triumph.

"Who are you?" cried Bob, fiercely, releasing his hold of Ainslie, and gazing in angry astonishment at the intruder.

"Damnation," groaned Hooker, as he recognised Joe, and saw that he had been their betrayer.

"Thank you, Joe," said William, coming forward and receiving the will from his hand; you have done me a good turn just now. If it had not been for you, the rascals would have succeeded in their desperate purpose."

The others had now risen, baffled and mortified. This last chance was lost, and ruin was now inevitable.

"Don't look so sulky at me, Mr Hooker," chuckled Joe, who highly enjoyed the lawyer's discomfiture. "That was rather a rude salutation; but you must admit that circumstances rendered it necessary."

"I did not expect that you would betray me, Joe," said the lawyer, looking daggers at his late instrument.

"Of course not, or you would have looked better after me," answered Joe, with a laugh.

"What does all this mean, Dan? Who is this?" asked Bob, who was now fast recovering himself.

Hooker turned away his head, but said nothing.

"I was a poacher once," said Joe, bluntly. "I was a short while ago the tool of your knavish brother-in-law; at present, I am a servant to Mr and Mrs Ainslie."

"He speaks truly, sir," said William, turning to Hooker. "Your villany in that direction has also failed. The lady who was imprisoned by your agency is now my wife, and we are at this moment on our way to Broomfield Park."

What a miserable man was Daniel Hooker now! In one hour he had lost his reputation, and been thoroughly exposed and detected. He threw himself into a chair, and hid his face in his hands. Bob saw his agony, and duped though he had been by him, he could not help pitying him. For himself, however, he had resolved how to act, and stepping up to Ainslie, thus addressed him—

"Now that I have got a little time for reflection, Mr Ainslie, I hardly regret that a discovery has taken place. I never was fond of secrets, or of appearing anything but what I was in reality; and ever since I consented to yield to the temptation placed before me, and became the ostensible owner of this place, I have been in a most dissatisfied state. Not on moral grounds, mark you. I scorn to hint at anything like a tenderness of conscience. No, no. It was simply because it is my nature to hate hypocrisy, not because I care three straws for morality. I am rather glad, therefore, than otherwise, that the affair has blown, and that the will has just now been preserved. It was but on the impulse of the moment, and to save ourselves from disgrace, that I foolishly aided Mr Hooker in his attempt. As to any steps you may see fit to take, to revenge yourself for the injury we have done you, of course I can say nothing; but I hereby and at once admit the fraud of which we have been

guilty, and renounce all claim to the estate. From this moment you are master here. We ourselves are in your power. If you are strict with us, we, of course, cannot complain ; if generous, we will be grateful and thankful.'

"Bravo!" cried Joe, whose generous nature had been softened by Fergusson's frank statements.

"You are right, Joe," said Ainslie, after a pause. "Such an open confession deserves to be kindly received. Mr Fergusson, I am truly sorry that a gentleman of your frank, open nature, should think so loosely of moral duty. Were you steered by that grand helm for humanity, you would become a brilliant member of society."

"I might have done that once," said Bob, with a sigh, "but the time is past. The fact is, Mr Ainslie, I was left to myself when very young, to follow the dictates of a wayward heart. I had no one to restrain me, and I did not restrain myself; so here I am now, as you term it, a helmless barque on the wild dangerous ocean."

"May I ask you what you desire to do now?"

"I hardly know. In another hemisphere I might become a better man. If you are kind enough to let me go, I would emigrate to America, and strive to become what you have just named—a respectable member of society."

"I will assist you in your resolution, Mr Fergusson," said William, taking him kindly by the hand. I will provide you with the means of carrying your intention into effect."

"Thank you," said Bob, brushing a tear from his eye. "You are the first that has opened the fountain of my heart, but I am not ashamed to show there is a fountain there. Depend upon it, sir, I will endeavour earnestly to prove worthy of your generosity."

"Enough, Mr Fergusson; I don't doubt it," replied the

young man, shaking him once more warmly by the hand. Poor Bob was forced to turn aside his head that he might weep unseen.

"Mr Hooker," said Ainslie, turning to the lawyer, who continued to sit in sullen silence. "From what I know of you, I fear much reformation is not to be expected from you. The lady, however, whom you have injured even more deeply than me, has requested me to deal leniently with you; and for her sake, not yours, I will be merciful. But only on one condition, and that is, that you refund the thousand pounds you received from Mr Fergusson, and leave Broomfield and its neighbourhood for ever."

"I accept your terms," answered Hooker. "Your conditions shall be complied with. If I am at liberty to go, I had rather leave this house at once."

"You may in a minute, but first it will be requisite to acquaint the servants with the change. It is not at all necessary to mention the painful particulars. It will be quite sufficient to inform them that such a will has been found. You will, therefore, be kind enough to do this immediately after I am gone. I will leave Joe in charge of the place. Good morning, gentlemen. Our meeting has been far from a pleasant one, but it has terminated more harmoniously than I expected."

So saying, William left the room, and proceeded to the inn by the wayside, where Jessie had been all this time in a state of great anxiety.

In a few minutes the happy pair were driving rapidly along on the way to Broomfield Park.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CONQUEST.

THE five miles of road between the Grange and Broomfield were soon passed over, almost too soon for Jessie, for she felt very nervous in prospect of the meeting with her parents, and her discovery to them as their daughter. William himself felt peculiarly strange. He was going to proclaim himself the child of another to those who had always considered him their own son, and introduce to their hearts and their love the being who had all along the only right there. But he was not unhappy. He felt no regret. He rejoiced rather that his beloved was about to enter a home which she could so eminently adorn, and avow herself the worthy member of such a noble circle. The humiliation also of Sir William was looked forward to with something like pleasure by him; and really one can hardly blame him for wishing to see such unhallowed, heartless pride as the baronet had evinced, brought low, and laid in shame in the dust.

"Come, cheer up, Jessie dear," he said to his bride, after a somewhat long silence which had been maintained by both. "Don't lose courage now. We are fast approaching the halls of your ancestors, the place where both of us were born."

"O, it will be such a terrible scene!" murmured Jessie, laying her head on his shoulder.

"Not so terrible as it will be interesting," whispered he; "but be sure it will end in happiness and delight."

"But at first it will be dreadful."

"Yet fear not, I will take the lead; I will place you in your mother's arms; I will lead you to receive a father's embrace."

"Without such support, dear William, I could never go through it," returned she, looking fondly up in his face. But the consolation that you are at hand to uphold is indeed sweet and precious to my heart. Here are the papers. Will you take and present them to Sir William?"

"With pleasure, dearest. You will not be required to speak till the proofs are adduced, and all are convinced that you are indeed their child."

"Thanks, dearest, thanks. Now I am repaid for any little sacrifice I have made in the matter. Ah! is this the entrance to the hall?"

"It is; but compose yourself," returned Ainslie, as the carriage drew up before a splendid gateway. The porter hastened from the lodge to undo the bars and admit the vehicle; but when he caught sight of Ainslie, he could only stand in amazement, and gaze upon his countenance.

"Ho! Andrew, how do you do?" cried William, with a good-humoured smile. "You didn't expect to see me, I suppose? But are you not going to admit us? Surely I deserve a better reception than this, after being so long away."

"Lord love you, Master William!" exclaimed the delighted old man, when he had somewhat recovered from his astonishment, "what a surprise you have given me!"

"Are you glad or sorry, then, to see me back? Must I go away again, or are you going to swing back that ponderous gate, and allow us to pass?"

"Sorry! Why, I don't know what to do for joy. Open the gate? Of course I will; and never have I opened it with a lighter heart than I do this day."

Is Sir William and Lady Ainslie at home?" inquired William, as the porter was performing his office.

"Yes, sir," answered Andrew. "They have always been at home since—since you went away. The Rev. Mr Bennet went up to the hall about an hour ago."

And now the gate was opened wide, and the carriage drove through. When passing the old man, William held out his hand to him. The happy-hearted servant seized it in both of his, and shook it warmly, while tears of joy coursed down his wrinkled face. Next moment, the travellers were whirling along the avenue that led through the park, towards the mansion-house.

Jessie had watched the scene at the gate with great interest. By the conduct of Andrew, she learned how greatly her husband was beloved, and in this she found an additional element of joy and rejoicing.

"See, Jessie! Look through amongst those trees, and you will get a glimpse of the house."

Jessie looked, but was too agitated to discern any thing.

"It's no use, William," she replied, falling back, and closing her eyes. "Eager as I am to see the home of my infancy, my foolish fears and heart-flutterings dim my vision. I can look at nothing now. I must have the meeting over before I can fix either my thoughts or eyes on anything else."

She felt her husband's arms tenderly encircle her, and his warm breath on her cheek, but she looked not up again till the carriage stopped.

"Now, dearest, the moment has come," whispered

William in her ear. "For your own sake, and my sake, be firm. Draw largely on that natural strength of mind which you possess, and all will go well."

He sprang from his seat as he spake, and stood ready to hand her out. His last words, and the immediate presence of the trial, recalled her to herself, and, though pale almost as marble, she was calm and composed.

By the time she alighted, a servant or two had appeared in the hall, and stood gazing in wonder at the unexpected arrival. William led Jessie up the steps, and was glad to find that she trembled not on his arm.

"Where are the family?" he inquired of a gaping, grining footman.

"In the drawing room, upstairs," was the answer.

"Any strangers with them?"

"None but the minister."

"That will do. You need not go up with us. Get a groom to take charge of the carriage."

Advancing through the hall, they leisurely ascended the wide staircase. William purposely moved at leisure, so that neither Jessie nor himself might be flurried when they entered the room, for he felt that, at such a moment, firmness was much needed by both.

The landing was gained. Ainslie gave his companion a significant look, which was as significantly returned. The next moment he threw open the door, and they walked into the room.

O, for the hand of a master painter to delineate the astonishment that appeared on the countenances of those assembled in that spacious apartment! The baronet was at the moment engaged in conversation with the Rev. Mr Bennet, and at sight of the intruders he sprang from his

seat, while a frown, wrathful as a tempestuous midnight, rushed to his brow. Lady Ainslie gave a cry of joyful astonishment, and leant forward with extended arms and eager anxious eyes. Miss Bridget took a pinch of snuff, but did not know what was the proper air to assume; while the minister, who of course knew nothing of the position of affairs, sat a calm and somewhat amused spectator of the singular scene.

An utter and solemn silence prevailed for a minute. The young people had stopped when two or three paces beyond the threshold. Jessie had no veil on her face, so that her features were clearly discernible to all, though she stood with downcast eyes, and in an attitude of graceful, unassuming humility.

Again was Sir William struck dumb by the singular resemblance to his wife, and for a moment that idea alone filled his mind. But following it came the thought that his son had discovered her retreat, and—horrid suspicion—married her! The imagination maddened him, and rage having overcome astonishment, he drew himself haughtily up, and said, with stern coldness—

“What does this mean, sir? Who is that person you have brought with you?”

“My wife, sir,” was the equally cold and stately reply.

“Indeed, sir!” rejoined the baronet, with a sneer which, however, hardly concealed the volcano of passion which blazed within.

Miss Bridget actually held up both her hands in horror; while Lady Ainslie turned to her husband with an appealing look, as if to deprecate any violence on his part.

“And pray, sir,” continued Sir William, in a hoarse choking voice, “what are we to understand by your presence here?”

"That we expect to be welcomed and loved, as is, in the circumstances, most meet and seemly. Yet, methinks, you are slow to accord us that kind reception which is our due."

"This, sir, is adding insult to injury. You well knew that your appearance here, in the position which you now avow, would be only a piece of insolent mockery, after what passed at our last meeting."

"Many changes have taken place since then, Sir William," returned the young man, calmly; "and you may depend upon it, that unless I had thought you would now receive this lady—my wife—with kindness and affection, you would not have been troubled with this visit."

"Then let me tell you, once for all, that you are mistaken. My former resolution is a fixed and unalterable one. You took my curse away with you. It rests upon you still, and will now rest upon you for——"

"Stop, sir; for your own sake, stop," interrupted William. "The guilt upon your soul is already heavy enough, and the coming remorse will be hard enough to bear. Do not, I beseech you, add to the burden by such language as you were about to use. Listen to me, and I will tell you that which will change the whole current of your feeling——"

"Away, sir, away!" broke in Sir William, for the raging storm within could no longer be suppressed. "You think to cajole and appease me, but you are wrong—miserably wrong. If you have been mad enough to brave me by an act against which I warned you, and which I did all in my power to prevent, you must assuredly bear the consequences. I command you, therefore, instantly to leave this house——"

"Will you listen to me, Sir William?"

"I will not listen, sir. Go; there is the door by which you came."

Here a sharp, piercing shriek broke from Jessie's lips, and she would have fallen to the ground, had not her husband caught her in his arms.

"Inhuman monster!" said the latter, glaring fiercely at the baronet, "have you no pity for your own child?"

Lady Ainslie sprang forward to Jessie's assistance; but her husband thrust her rudely aside.

"Back, woman," he exclaimed, fiercely; "you have opposed and deceived me sufficiently in this matter already. You have all along encouraged that boy in his disobedience; and now, when his insolence has reached its height, you would still take his part. But I am master here, and shall not suffer my authority to be thus contemned."

William bore Jessie to a sofa that stood near, and hung over her with tearless agony.

"For Heaven's sake, bring a glass of water," he cried, looking round. Mr Bennet, who had narrowly watched the scene, went to a side table, where the article in question stood, and advanced with it in his hand.

"What are you going to do?" roared the baronet, coming in before him.

"An act of common humanity," was the calm reply; and the venerable man of God bent on Sir William a look before which the proud and angry aristocrat quailed. He instinctively shrunk back, and allowed the minister to go forward to the sofa, where he tenderly bathed the temples of the inanimate girl.

It was some time before signs of returning sensibility manifested themselves. Sir William retired to the window, and looked sullenly out upon the lawn. His wife could no

longer be restrained, but approached and knelt before the sofa, to chafe the hands that hung helpless and bloodless over its side.

At last the blood came back to the pale face, and, with a sigh, Jessie opened her eyes. The first object she beheld was the face of Lady Ainslie hanging yearningly over her, and with a wild cry of joy, she exclaimed, "My mother, O, my mother!" and flung her arms passionately around her neck.

"She says truly; Lady Ainslie is indeed her mother," murmured William to the minister, as he stood by his side.

"Her mother? O yes, of course her marriage with you makes her such," answered Mr Bennet.

"No, sir; I mean she is her own, her only child. Ay, you may start, sir," he added, looking to the baronet, who had turned suddenly round when he heard the last words. "Let me tell you that the girl you have so long persecuted, and vilified, and wronged, is no other than your own daughter."

"What mean you?" asked Sir William, wildly, while Lady Ainslie looked up in breathless astonishment, and Miss Bridget adjusted the spectacles on her nose to have a better view of all parties.

"I mean neither more nor less than what I say," replied William; "and had you not been so outrageously violent, you would have known it ere now. Here are papers to prove the truth of what I now assert. Read them, and be convinced."

The baronet took the papers with a trembling hand, but found he was too much agitated to peruse them. He therefore gave them to Mr Bennet, and desired that gentleman to read them aloud. With a calm steady hand the minister

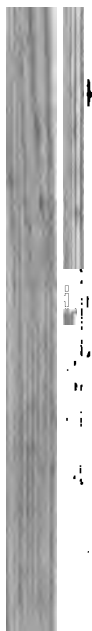
unfolded the packet, and prepared to read the documents in their order, while his listeners stood around him in awful excitement and expectation.

It would be difficult, indeed, to describe the feelings which rushed bewilderingly through the minds of Sir William and Lady Ainslie, as Mr Bennet read to them the clear and succinct statement of Mrs Melville regarding the birth of the two children. The possibility of such a thing taking place as the changing of the little ones, was at once perceived by both; for they remembered that the births took place at exactly the same time, and in circumstances such as would enable Dr Sharp to practise the fraud. Then, the baronet clearly recollected of his promise to the doctor, in the event of his child being a boy—a promise which the doctor called upon him to fulfil, and which he did fulfil shortly after the children were born. Then the amazing likeness between Jessie and Lady Ainslie, which had been observed by every one who knew them both—which had even more than once stunned Sir William himself—went to place the thing beyond a doubt.

Long before the worthy minister had done reading the various proofs, maternal affection was working strongly in Lady Ainslie's breast. No sooner had he read the main facts of the birth-hour, than she saw, and believed at once, that Jessie Melville was her daughter. Not a doubt, not even its shadow, lingered for a moment on her mind. Instinct, reason, love, all showed her that it was the truth; and while the minister continued to read, she fixed her eyes on Jessie's face with the fondest, yearning delight.

At last the papers were finished, and silence reigned in the room. Poor Jessie had sat with downcast eyes all the time, but at the conclusion she timidly raised them to





Lady Ainslie's face. One glance of deepest affection passed between mother and child, but it was enough for both. It told the one that she was owned and loved; it told the other that she had found a priceless treasure. Uttering a loud cry, Lady Ainslie rushed forward to the sofa, with open arms, and clasped Jessie to her heart.

"My child, my dear child!" she sobbed, and could say nothing more.

Sir William still stood near the window with a hell of agony raging in his breast. He spoke not, moved not—but, O! the writhing tortures of that dread moment. With the knowledge that this was his child, came the recollection of the foul injustice, the deep, deep wrong he had done her, and his soul became a battle-field, in which pride, fear, remorse, and parental affection fought fiercely together. And the contest was all the more dreadful that it was outwardly concealed. To all appearance, the proud man stood calm, stern, inflexible, and none present knew what was passing within. They imagined that he had resolutely shut his heart against the poor girl, and would refuse to acknowledge the relationship which had just been asserted.

Lady Ainslie quitted Jessie, and approached her husband.

"William," she said, "your heart, as well as mine, tells you that this is our child. O, for Heaven's sake, be not thus cruel and hardened. She waits to receive your blessing, even as she has received mine. Deny it not, O, deny it no. Come, let me lead you to her; let us embrace her together."

Still the proud man spoke not and moved not.

"Sir William," said Mr Bennet, approaching and laying his hand on his shoulder, "let me entreat you to give way to your better nature. In my Great Master's name, I im-

plore you to open your heart, and receive into its warmest recess your new-found child."

Still the proud man spoke not and moved not, and the minister turned sadly away, grieved because sin and Satan could not be overcome.

Silence, deep, solemn silence, again prevailed, and Sir William felt something soft, gentle, and tender, twine round his knees. Then a sweet, rich, yet pleading voice, uttered one word, and that word was—"Father!"

A convulsive shudder shook Sir William's frame, as if that word had sent an electric shock through every limb. Then, with a sudden impetuous motion, he turned and snatched her in his arms, straining her to his heart with frenzied energy. He did not, could not, speak; but sobs—loud, choking sobs—burst forth from his bosom, and he wept unrestrainedly. Thick and fast gushed the tears from the long pent-up fountain, and fell upon Jessie's face, for her head now nestled in his bosom, and she, too, wept.

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated Mr Bennet, with fervent earnestness, as this touching scene was being enacted.

Lady Ainslie went forward, put her arms round her husband's neck and kissed him, while smiles and tears mingled themselves together on her face.

"O, my daughter, dare I call you such?" groaned the remorse-riven baronet. "Dare I hope to receive your forgiveness for all the injuries I have done you?"

"Yes, O yes," answered Jessie, in her sweet, musical voice. "All is forgiven and forgotten in this hour of holy joy."

"Bless you, bless you!" replied her father, straining her again to his bosom. "I cannot, dare not, forget the sin and crime of which I have been guilty; but the assurance of your pardon makes my punishment less heavy."

Miss Bridget now thought it high time to interfere. She had remained till now a silent spectator of the whole; but when she saw Sir William actually embrace Jessie, whom she had all along considered a low-born, and therefore contemptible girl, and own her as his daughter, her indignation knew no bounds. She approached the parents and child as they clung to each other, and, drawing herself up to a most dignified height, said, in her haughtiest tones—

“Sir William, I am ashamed of you—to be so easily imposed on by a story like this. The only person able to corroborate the unlikely tale is Dr Sharp; but you know as well as I, and as well as the framers of this cunning hoax, that Dr Sharp is dead.”

“Stay,” cried Mr Bennet, who, as well as the others, had listened to Miss Bridget’s indignant insinuation; “when Dr Sharp was on his death-bed, I received a packet from him, with instructions not to open it unless in connection with the name of Mrs Melville, or Jessie Melville. I have no doubt that this contains the corroboration that Miss Bridget requires, but shall hasten to the manse, and return with it immediately.

“It is scarcely necessary,” said Sir William. “Lady Ainslie and myself are entirely persuaded of the truth of these papers. Nevertheless, if you wish to examine Dr Sharp’s packet, it may be the means of convincing my kinswoman, who shares largely with me the sin of family pride.”

“It will be much better for all parties to do so,” answered the minister, at the same time leaving the room to go for the packet.

All this time William had stood silently gazing on the scene. He rejoiced greatly when the baronet gave way, and

folded Jessie to his heart as his own child ; but now a kind of sadness came over him, for he was altogether unnoticed. In Broomfield Park he had hitherto been regarded as the son and heir of its occupants ; but the love that had always been lavished on him was now his no more, and he seemed forgotten by them. Jessie was the first to remember him ; and she, in a moment, divined the feelings which must be agitating his heart.

Raising her head from her father's breast, she said, in kind accents, pointing to her husband—

“ But we are forgetting William ; he is still your son.”

“ My dear, dear William, forgive us,” said Lady Ainalie, running forward, and throwing herself into his arms ; “ it is the strangeness of the news that has made us forget you—but I am your mother still ; I love you as dearly as ever. Say, will you not feel towards me the same affection as before ?”

“ I will indeed,” he replied, pressing her ardently in his arms. “ I must claim a share along with Jessie in your love ; and I well know that, although we do not now stand in the same holy relation to each other which we have always supposed, you are too kind to cast me from your heart !”

“ Never, never ; you are my own noble, generous boy.”

“ Will you shake hands with me, William ?” said the baronet, approaching frankly towards him. “ I am heartily ashamed of my past conduct. In my secret judgment, I knew and felt I was cherishing false sentiments, but my pride would not suffer my judgment to yield. That pride is now, however, gone—and, I hope to God, gone for ever. Your noble ideas, nobly held and nobly avowed, I always inwardly recognised as true, and now openly declare my adherence to them. It is the mind, indeed, that makes the man, and

neither blood nor birth. I know I deserve your scorn and indignation, but now humbly crave to be forgiven. You have conquered : will you be merciful ?”

“ Say no more, sir, say no more,” replied the young man, grasping his hand. “ I cannot tell how much I am gratified by this acknowledgment on your part. I was grieved at such a weakness clinging to a noble and generous character like yours, and am glad, indeed, that the cloud has cleared away. Pray, forgive me for any strong expressions I may have used in former conversations.”

“ Forgiveness for this, my dear boy, is quite unnecessary. Your language, on the occasions to which you refer, was not a whit too strong. Injustice and cruelty like mine deserved much worse treatment. But come, tell us more about all this. I am so bewildered, that I don’t know what to imagine. How or where were these papers discovered ?”

“ Jessie got them, more than a year ago, from Mrs Mel—I mean my mother, when on her death-bed.”

“ More than a year ago ?” repeated the baronet, in astonishment. “ Why, then, were we not informed immediately ? This would have prevented all the painful things which have since occurred. Ah ! I see, he added, with a sad smile, “ you were afraid that if I had known that Jessie was my daughter, and you Mrs Melville’s son, I would still have prevented the marriage. My principle, you thought, would remain the same, though the persons were changed. Say now, was not this the reason of your silence ?”

“ Pardon me, sir,” answered William ; “ I do not know whether, on your supposition, I might have cherished this fear, and thus acted in consequence ; but all this was put beyond my power, from the fact that I was entirely ignorant of the matter till the day before yesterday.”

"Amazing! Then I must look for an explanation from Jessie herself," said Sir William, looking fondly at his daughter.

Jessie blushed, gave William an appealing look, and hid her face in her mother's bosom.

William understood her, and hastened to speak—

"I am afraid, sir, you would not get the exact truth from Jessie," he said. "Allow me, therefore, to inform you, as far as I know, and I am sure you will be filled with admiration and delight. Mrs Melville's death occurred just after Jessie and I engaged ourselves to each other. Jessie, on becoming possessed of the knowledge, resolved not to divulge the secret till after our marriage. Not long after this, however, she discovered that my cousin—at least, Grace Fergusson—loved me passionately, and with a magnanimity almost unparalleled, she resolved to sacrifice herself and her own happiness for Grace's sake. You know how she nobly fulfilled the high resolution; and we can easily understand that to a mind such as Jessie's, this first sacrifice involved perpetual silence as to her birth. Providence saw fit, after the sacrifice was fully consummated, to remove Grace, and thus open the way again for our union; an event which, of course, would have occurred much sooner, if—if——"

"If I had not caused Jessie to be imprisoned," said Sir William, with emotion. "But how did you discover her? Hooker thought there would be no possibility of such a thing."

"And, humanly speaking, he was right," returned the young man. "But he did not know, and, consequently, could not take into account, the goodness of his prisoner, and the influence she, on this account, might acquire over her jailer. She converted Joe Stewart from infidelity to

Christianity ; and after that, he would, of course, do anything for her. He soon discovered me ; we renewed our engagement, and, after waiting till a year had expired from the time of Grace's death, we were finally married the day before yesterday. On our wedding night, Jessie put these papers into my hand, and to-day we are here."

"And here you shall remain," said the baronet, joyfully. Then turning to the sofa, where his wife and daughter were sitting together in a fond embrace, he exclaimed, while tears again flowed down his cheeks, "Come to my arms again, my child. O, what a treasure thou art ! Never again will I think that, in the lower spheres of life, there is only lowness and littleness of soul. I have been taught a lesson which I shall never, never forget."

"All things considered, my dear husband, I do not think any of us will have cause to regret the past," said Lady Ainslie. "We have been all of us either tried or purified by the course of events, and these must now have a beneficial effect on every one of us. Let us prove the truth of this by our future conduct."

"You are right, my dear wife," answered Sir William. "I owe you, also, much for your forbearance under my petulance and injustice. Will you, too, forgive ?——"

"It is done before it is asked, my dear," interrupted Lady Ainslie, gaily, giving her husband a hearty kiss.

Mr Bennet here entered breathless, with Dr Sharp's packet in his hand. This he opened before them, and found it to contain a full corroboration of Mrs Melville's narrative, so that even Miss Bridget was now satisfied, and condescended to salute Jessie on the cheek.

Mr Bennet was now informed of all particulars by the delighted baronet ; and he hastened to congratulate the

family; for he was a genuinely kind-hearted man, and one who delighted to "rejoice with those who rejoice."

Sir William thought his cup of happiness was now full, and that it admitted of no increase; but he was mistaken. The matter of Grace's will and Hooker's treachery was yet to be unfolded to him; and when he became aware of all things concerning the Grange, he almost went mad with joy. To compose his mind, and the minds of all present, Mr Bennet proposed to engage in prayer. This was thankfully acceded to by every one, and the little company gathered round the footstool of the Almighty, to render thanks, solicit pardon, and supplicate new blessing.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONCLUSION.

Our story is now virtually brought to a close. The last Chapter finished the course of incidents which constitutes the framework of the narrative, and for the purpose of detailing which the narrative was written. Properly, then, our work ought to have extended no further; but as it occurs to us that our readers may desire to know, in some measure, the subsequent history of the principal personages of the tale, we forbear to lay down the pen till this duty is also performed. Several years have elapsed since the facts occurred, and the course of time has told upon all more or less.

Richard and Mary have found the married state a happy one, and both declare that it is the only proper sphere for man and woman to occupy. After cultivating most assiduously for some time, we are happy to say that Richard has been successful in rearing a very respectable crop of whiskers, and can now defy Mary to gibe him as she once did on that sore subject. No further gone than last New Year's Day, the happy pair might have been seen sitting in the pit of the Theatre Royal, with each a precious pledge of affection perched on their knees, and the little urchins clapping their hands heartily at the comicalities of clown and pantaloon. How they managed to fight their way

in, through such a dense mass as choked up the passage to the pit on that occasion, is a mystery to us—but there they were, wedged into the heart of the house; Mary, as blithe and saucy as ever, though somewhat more matronly in appearance, and Richard, himself, looking as proud and spruce as his happy circumstances warrant. Be it known unto our readers, however, that they do not now live in the Horse Wynd. Their present place of residence we will not mention, as this might bring upon them many visitors, desirous to know more of the events here narrated; and however hospitable we, by experience, know them to be, yet we also know that visits of this kind would not be relished by the modest pair. We, therefore, bid them farewell, and wish them many, many years of the richest domestic felicity.

Hooker, the only truly hopeless villain of our drama, decamped shortly after the scene at the Grange, and no authentic intelligence has since been had concerning him. The good folks at Broomfield wondered very much at his sudden and unaccountable departure; for to the very last he had maintained the character of a fair-spoken, honest-dealing man. We suspect that if a certain village in the far north was explored, the inhabitants thereof could point out a house inhabited by a man who answers pretty correctly to the description we gave of "Sharp Daniel." They will tell, moreover, that he keeps himself very retired, mingles not with his neighbours, and is, in fact, scarcely better known in the village than he was on the day of his arrival. Poor Daniel! In that lonely retreat of his, may conscience speak, and repentance come, and pardon and peace be finally arrived at. May the sun of his life not go down among the thick, foul clouds that it long waded

through; but with him—even with him, for he is our brother, dear reader, your brother and ours—even with him, may there be light at even-time, and may he at last go to his long rest with a smile—the smile of hope and joy upon his features!

The thousand pounds which the lawyer refunded was presented to Bob Fergusson by Mr Ainslie, and with this in his pocket he started for the shores of the new world. He took his way to the backwoods of Canada, where, with a brave heart and a strong arm, he toiled as a woodman, felling the trees which encumbered the ground he purchased. He is now owner of a large, fertile farm, on the shores of a beautiful lake, and has nobly gained that respectable position in society which he promised to aim at.

Joe Stewart, who, we are sure, has become a favourite with our readers, would on no account hear of becoming factor for the Grange estate—a situation which Mr Ainslie pressed him to accept. No; his earnest desire was to be the favourite attendant of his master and mistress. His admiration of, and gratitude to, Jessie, increased every day, and he could not be content unless he was attending and ministering to her desires. It was therefore settled that he should be something like a confidential valet to his master, and ride behind in the carriage when they drove out. In this position he found perfect contentment, and so he was allowed to occupy it.

The establishment at Heriot Row was broken up shortly after the union of Jessie and William; and Mrs Fergusson, with her grandchildren, now reside in the country, in a sweet little cottage at the top of a finely-wooded slope, not very far from the Grange. Another governess has been provided for the children—or, as we should now call them, the young.

ladies—but they have never forgot their first kind teacher—
Jessie Melville.

Regarding our principal group of characters, whom we left at Broomfield Park in a state of delightful emotion, caused by the discovery and reception of Jessie as the daughter of its occupants, we have only further to add, that, after a long and serious deliberation, in which Mr Bennet, the minister, took part, it was resolved that William should retain his name, and that the young couple should take up their abode at the Grange as Mr and Mrs Ainslie. This was particularly Jessie's wish; and the baronet at once agreed to it, since it would avoid that painful public disclosure of family affairs which the change of name would necessarily involve. It will, however, be impossible for William to take the baronet's title when Sir William goes the way of all the earth, and it is an understood thing that this will lie dormant until the majority of a certain young gentleman, who, with one or two other little bodies, runs briskly about the walks and shrubberies at the Grange. It is fondly hoped, however, that the *inter-regnum* will be short. The baronet and his gentle, kind-hearted lady, though obviously descending the hill of life, bid fair to enjoy a long, sunny evening; though Miss Bridget now sleeps with her ancestors, and was buried with due honours in the family vault.

Should any of our readers happen to see a beautiful open carriage rolling along Prince's Street, drawn by two splendid bays, containing a good-looking, manly gentleman, a tall, graceful lady, and two or three rosy, healthy, happy-looking children, with a stout, bushy-whiskered man sitting behind, they may safely conclude that they see before them the Grange equipage and the three principal personages of our tale. Pleasant and contented they all look, for the days of

their peculiar trials are over, and they are now reaping the reward of faith and perseverance.

But we cannot finally close without adverting to the great lesson which our story is fitted, and, we may say, intended to teach. Our whole and only aim, dear reader, has not been to amuse you. We had a much higher object in view, and fondly trust it will not be altogether unattained. Our design was to inculcate the great and noble duty of self-sacrifice—to show it adhered to in perhaps the most difficult of all circumstances; and to show that, when faithfully maintained, it brings sooner or later an abundant reward. Every one of us is called upon in our different spheres to exercise this duty to a greater or less degree, but, alas! many of us shun and shrink from it. What is the cause of much of the social disorder which exists around us, but our neglect of self-sacrifice? Let this spirit be generally cherished, and its practice extended to the great and the minute things of life, and the many strings of the large-sounding harp of humanity will send forth far more harmonious strains. Selfishness and heartlessness will then give place to generosity and benevolence, and, under the kindly influence of these, the broad field of human hearts will send forth fruits of the richest flavours and flowers of the most fragrant perfume. We all believe in, and hope for, “a good time coming;” but, can we expect it to have an unnatural advent? Is it possible that the golden age, which has been looked for and longed for by the world for many a day, can come while men continue to practise those sins and crimes, shortcomings and unkindnesses, which render society so corrupted, and individuals so unhappy? If we look for this, our expectation will be vain. Peace,

love, and harmony, and the other elements which are to constitute the *grace* and glory of "the good time coming," must first exist in the heart of man, and be practised in his every-day life. In no other way, and by no other means, can we hope for its arrival. Let us, then, resolve to do our utmost to hasten it on—

"And so to live, that when the sun
Of our existence sinks in night,
Memorials sweet of mercies done
May shrine our names in memory's light;
And the blest seeds we scattered, bloom
An hundred-fold in days to come."

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